BRITOMART.

Britomart.

A Novel.

BY

Mrs. Herbert Martin,

Author of

"*Bonnie Lesley*," "*Common Clay*,"
"*A Man and a Brother*," *etc.*

"Faire Britomart, whose constant mind
Ne reckt of ladies love . . .
She forward went
With stedfast courage and stout hardiment.
Ne evil thing she feared, ne evil thing she ment."

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CHAPTER I.

GEOFFREY and Penrose were established, I cannot say *comfortably*, but securely, in the pit—the vulgar, working-class pit of a theatre, in the very height of the season! Geoffrey was whimsically tickled with the situation. His proper place, till now, had been in the slowly-filling stalls, his proper garments just that same immaculate-fronted, black-coated uniform, which every "Johnnie" was exhibiting in the garden-bed of costly

brocades, and softly tinted silks, which distinguished the feminine part of "Society." He wondered if he should be "spotted" in his morning suit, squeezed in beside a comfortable-looking, wheezy tradesman, on his right, and his cousin Penrose, in her dark-coloured hat and dress, on his left. He was not "snob enough to care a hang," he said, but he wondered what his proper-behaved acquaintances might say to this new development of Bohemianism in the usually correct London barrister. They had walked to the theatre, Penrose having sternly declined his offer of a hansom, and the walk had not seemed long, though it had reached nearly three miles. They had found plenty to talk about, but only just at the end he had told her what his mind was full of, and then he had jerked it out baldly and grimly—

"I met old Field this morning. He told me that Viola *is* engaged to Lees."

Penrose halted abruptly and grew pale, she drew a long sighing breath.

"Oh, Geoffrey!"

"Yes; it is true."

"So soon! But soon or late, that makes no difference—it is the thing. I always hoped — I always thought that, after all——" She stopped and gathered breath, then finished her sentence in a low voice, "that, after all, she would keep to you."

"No fear!" he laughed bitterly. "You never will remember all that that would involve!"

Penrose did not answer. She was trying desperately hard to be sure she had spoken the truth. Had she really *hoped* that? Was there not some lurking wish that was too hatefully selfish to be acknowledged, that Geoffrey and Viola might *not* come together again? She struggled to be loyal, to remember her ideal of the girl she had been bent on loving. If it would

cross her mind as they walked together like this—such good comrades—how full and sweet a life-long walk together might be. Was it her fault? Can any woman, however heroic her determination for self-abnegation might be, help wishing and longing now and then? She did not ask much, after all, only for a man's friendship; she had never dreamt of being differently loved. The question of the sexes in relation to herself had really never entered into her life—that stoical, bare, hard life of hers, which had never been lighted by the soft sunlight of romance, never lifted out of the stern region of duty and every day. She could not talk just then any more. She seemed half stunned by the rush of new sensations, by the struggle to regain her own assurance of position, her own calm outlook on a future of mere dutiful self-denial.

Geoffrey seemed determined not to discuss the question either; he had plenty

to say about the people round them, which amused Penrose, though she half resented it. They were *not*, she declared, beings belonging to another planet, as he seemed to think. She, too, was of them—born a child of the people—worse born, she thought, but did not say, than many of those he scoffed at. He declared she was a socialist, a leveller; she did not understand what socialism really meant or wanted, she answered; but if it meant justice as well as kindness, she was for it.

"You think because a person lives in a little house, and earns, perhaps, two or three pounds a week, that they are not of your flesh and blood. Hath not a clerk eyes? Hath not a clerk feelings? You are eaten up with pride and exclusiveness, Geoffrey!"

"Come, I like that—when I am sitting in a half-crown pit, and have walked three miles, and crushed for it. That's the reward of virtue!"

"But you feel as if you were a duke masquerading."

"Nonsense. I feel like a fellow out for a spree, and enjoying himself with a very agreeable cousin.'

"It must be difficult for you to enjoy anything like this; you can't imagine what it is to me to go to a theatre anyhow. My heart beats when the curtain goes up; you would laugh at me if you knew how delicious it all seems to me."

Geoffrey smiled, a kinder and a softer smile than usual, with not a trace of cynicism in it.

"Well, Penrose," he said gently, "if I can get you happiness so easily and cheaply, it is better a thousand times than spending one's self and one's substance on what gives but little return, after all. I wish I had the loan of your eyes and your spirit now and then, to see how pleasure looks to a fresh, unspoilt, unhackneyed nature."

"I am sure," she answered gratefully, "it is not little you have done to give me pleasure. You are very good to me."

It was a new sensation to the man beside her to feel that he had been "very good" to any one. Not often had he been thanked like this, from the honest heart of a friend. He was ashamed to feel how little he deserved the gratitude, yet he was a better man for it, and he was aware of a warm contentment in the neighbourhood of the girl who met him with so loyal a trust, and so pure an unconsciousness of any fettering restraint. It was a new experience for one who had made a careless kind of love, signifying nothing on either side to many a woman, and who had been a passionate lover of one utterly unlike Penrose, to be thus thrown closely into contact with a nature that, though deeply womanly, was ignorant as a child of the complications and intrigues which

make a thorny hedge round the relations of the sexes. He had always, since he knew his cousin really well, felt a kind of intimate friendliness for her, sweeter in its way, but not dissimilar from that which binds together two men. For the first time, and suddenly to-night, it had come home to him that there *was* a difference, and a significant one, that Penrose was, after all, a woman that a man might love—not as friend, but as sweetheart and wife. Her quick breathing seemed to bring warm flushes into her face, her clear grey eyes had a new brightness in them, less often seen than the calm candour which was the usual expression they wore, and the long eyelashes were more apt to veil what lay in those eyes. She was as plainly dressed as ever, with as little care to attract in coquettish details, which were always absent in her case, as little as ever was made of the real beauty of her thick wavy hair, yet he thought

he had never seen her look so well, so absolutely handsome as to-night in her unnoticeable hat and dark plain dress. He was not in the least in love with her, of course not! That was too absurd an idea to contemplate for an instant. No; but he felt that there might be men, some man, who would, perhaps, some day wake up to the possibilities in this woman, and find out the beautiful brave spirit that had its home behind those honest, serious grey eyes. It would have to be a man out of the common way—given such a one to earn and deserve Penrose's love, the world might be all the better for the marriage of true souls. He should stand by, out in the cold. He knew himself to be a mere worldling, unfit for an ideal and spiritual love. He had never felt himself unworthy of Viola. He looked up as he thought of her, and saw her!

At the same moment Penrose's glance followed his. They both saw the four

people enter a box above them, two ladies and two middle-aged florid gentlemen with a great expanse of shirt front and diamond studs, the one of them red-haired, aggressively prominent, in a flush of triumph and success, fussily full of little attentions. Penrose hardly spared a glance to Mrs. Field, in spite of her smiling, radiant matronly comeliness and gorgeous externals, she was too full of the daughter to care to notice the mother. Viola was dressed in very pale heliotrope which seemed to take what little colour there was from her face. She looked thin, slight, nervous, fragile. She dropped into her place, throwing back the pretty white and gold cape from her shoulders as if its weight tired her. Her pretty fluffy light-brown hair was piled up elaborately, and a bright star shone in it, the only bright thing about her. She looked weary, absent, bored, distinctly sad. Mr. Lees took his place behind her, he was obviously

her lover—he carried the signs of courtship all over him. It was perfectly evident that he had just given her the beautiful fresh bouquet of light ferns and orchids, which she let drop out of her little listless hand on to the cushions before her. He was stooping over her, whispering, fussing, while the father and mother deliberately effaced themselves. The whole small comedy of the rich middle-aged wooer, the complacent parents, the indifferent object of the courtship was all plainly to be read by whomsoever cared to note it. Geoffrey and Penrose met each others' eyes suddenly, and read there that each had seen the same objects. They looked hastily away, and Geoffrey called her attention to the stage. The curtain was up; but, for a wonder, Penrose's attention was not on the scene, her mind was too full of the drama of life about her. She could not help stealing another, and another glance at the Fields' box, at

Viola. She had not seen them, it was not likely, people don't look at the crowd in the pit, the masses don't exist for the classes. To be there was almost to be invisible, and one could gaze without fear of notice in return. No, she was perfectly unconscious of a presence which would have shaken her out of her listless composure in a moment. If she had known that Geoffrey was there, if their eyes had met across that gulf of unfamiliar faces, she would never have looked as she did now, Penrose was sure of that! Geoffrey seemed to have got over the shock of his recognition of her, he was just as before, to all appearance, if anything rather more animated. He was only anxious, apparently, to make Penrose laugh, to tease and distract her from her interest in the play. He was rather short-sighted, perhaps he had not recognized Viola at all. This doubt, however, was dispelled as they left the theatre and were a little outside of the

crowd in the streets softly lighted by a young moon, who sailed as serenely overhead, with her hurrying white clouds in attendance, as if instead of ugly sordid streets, she held her court above the marble walls and clear lake of a palace.

"You'd like to walk, Penrose? It is fine and warm enough."

"Oh yes, please. How good it is to breathe something fresh! It is a beautiful night."

"Yes. This dim moonlight makes a dream-city of ugly old London. If only one could hear nightingales instead of cab-wheels. Well, did you enjoy the play?"

"Y-yes; oh yes—it was good; but not so much as the other I went to. There was something, I don't know what, that spoilt it a little, something jarred. It was—is that what people would call *French*, Geoffrey? I mean the story of the play to-night."

"Perhaps so," he answered, rather absently. "I dare say it was not quite ideal. Won't you take my arm, Penrose? I know you don't want help; but we should be more comfortable so, shouldn't we? Had you rather not?"

For a moment Penrose hesitated—she even put up her hand, then something suddenly made it fall. No, she would not. She did not know what suggested to her that she could not pass her arm within his at that moment. It was a new sensation, and so troublesome a one that she could not analyze it. Till this moment her intercourse with Geoffrey had been free, untrammelled, absolutely frank, without an *arrière pensée*. Now, she thought, this was the last time she would walk alone with him in the dimness of the spring night as she had walked before. She consciously nerved herself, with all the strength of her valiant spirit, to fight off the tumult of her thoughts, which might

frighten her if she were not armed *cap à pie* against them. Geoffrey did not press her to put her hand on his arm. They walked on side by side for a while in absolute silence. He broke it in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice—a man of the world can always hide what he feels, of course.

"I know you saw that party in the second-tier boxes, Penrose?"

"Yes, I saw them. Of course that was Mr. Lees?"

"Yes. I hope you admired him! A gentlemanly, unobtrusive sort of fellow, eh?" He gave a little laugh.

"Viola did not look strong," Penrose said, in a low voice, a little faltering.

"No."

"Nor—nor happy, Geoffrey. At least I thought not. I do not believe she will marry him."

"Oh yes, she will."

"She is not the sort of girl to

have forgotten you—nor to marry for money."

"My dear, how can you tell? Penrose, I have told you before, I tell you again, and you must believe me. You judge of others by yourself, and you are one of ten thousand. You are the very soul of truth, of constancy, of loyalty. You are not made like us—like Viola, and me."

"Hush! Hush! Don't talk so. I know you don't really mean it; but don't say it, Geoffrey. You are too hard on her and on yourself. And as for me, I have not been tried. I am no better, not the least better, than other women. I believe at heart you and she are true to each other. You must not let her go, you must save her from this marriage. There was something in her look—even at that distance I saw it—that made me so sorry I could hardly bear it."

"Penrose, what makes you care whether

she and I are happy or miserable? What can Viola be to you?"

"I do care," she said fervently. "I do care!"

"But why, *why?*"

"I can't tell you; I only know there's something in her face that goes to my heart. I don't *know* her, but I feel as if I loved her."

"And me? You do know me. Can you say that you love me too, Penrose?"

She drew a long, deep breath, and looked up at him. It was a brave and open look that seemed to defy him not to trust her. "Yes, Geoffrey, I love you. You are my friend."

She did not shirk the bold, strong word *love* which girl's lips falter over and disguise, she did not pare it down into a weaker epithet. She knew her own heart, and was not ashamed to show its riches. She had conquered the momentary

trembling of sex, and was as courageous as she was sure of the purity of her love.

"And you want me to be happy, dear Penrose?"

"With all my heart."

"Do you think I deserve to be? I'm not worthy such an affection as yours. I'm a poor sinner only just awake to the possibilities of a better kind of life from that which I've led these twenty years. It's an education to know a woman like you, a fortune to have you care for one! I wish to God I were a better fellow. When you said you *loved* me—that you were my friend—I never realized before that what a paltry thing I'd made of my life, and what such a one as you might have done with it. It was like you to say that, to say such a word without reserve. I shall never forget it!"

"We are cousins already. We may be almost like brother and sister. There's

nothing strange in a sister caring for her brother." The strong, brave voice had just the slightest quiver in it.

She was glad that there was so faint a light that he could not possibly see how her heart was beating—beating at her breast, nor that the tears would keep rising to her eyes. She never let them fall, but they were very near her lashes.

"Nothing kind and good is strange in you, dear," he said, in a curiously low and humble voice. "You've been a revelation to me. I will be more worthy of such a sister, if—if you are to be my sister, Penrose."

"I have never had any real, true, intimate friend. I like best, I think, to call you my *friend*, Geoffrey. It means more to me than brother."

"Then you'll let me say anything to you? You'll not turn away from me, you'll not be disgusted when you find out,

as you must do the longer and more intimately you know me, more and more how perfectly unideal and unheroic I am? You are on a different level altogether from me. The life you aim at and the world you see are not *my* life, *my* world at all. It has only dawned upon me lately how changed everything might be, and one's self, too, if—if one had your eyes to look through, your soul to feel with, your heart to love and pity. I have never even *tried* to aim at anything higher than my own satisfaction. I have reckoned it to my credit that I have been just a decent fellow, neither snob nor blackguard; but beyond that I've never reached. My oracle and my god have been the world. Of all atheism I suppose that is the most hopeless."

"It is not true, Geoffrey; it is not true!"

"I tell you it *is* true. I'm just laying the bare, unvarnished facts before you.

I'll not have your affection on false pretences. I am not worthy to tie your shoelace." He laughed a little, but he was in bitter earnest.

She put up her hand and clasped it round his arm. The need of some expression of the warm rush of love in her heart was too strong to be denied. They would not walk together like this at night again; their souls were open to each other; she would not deny him the knowledge that might help him.

"Geoffrey, dear Geoffrey"—she could not, if she would, have concealed the tenderness which enriched and deepened her voice—"you think much too well of me and much too badly of yourself; but I know there are times when it is a relief to condemn one's self and to feel how one falls short of what one would be. I am not good, as you think me. I am often hard and cold; I often, often fail; I am

dissatisfied with my life, and hate it sometimes when I should be more than content. There's very little I can do to help you, nothing, I'm afraid; but what there may be shall be yours, always yours. Friends can help each other, I suppose, or at least can make each other happier. You condemn yourself, you are very hard on yourself; but I know all the while how good you were to mother and to me at a time when we had done you harm, when many a man—if he had been selfish and bad, as you pretend to be—would have been an enemy. I *expected* you to be my enemy—indeed, I did—and when I found you kind, a friend instead, I felt that I should never forget it, never be anything but grateful to you."

"It was nothing but the fear of betraying what I felt, of behaving like a cad, that kept me quiet and civil then, Penrose."

"That is not true," she returned abruptly; "you will never make me believe it. I am not going to distrust or think badly of you, whatever you say. I have faith in you."

Her hand had fallen from his arm; he put his down and clasped it. They walked on together like this. Both hands were firm and calm; there was no passion, no caress in the grasp, yet the touch was comfortable.

Geoffrey had never felt as he did now. It seemed to him as if this pure and faithful love, so bravely shown him in the transparent mirror of her soul, had come over him like the waters of healing. He was humbled and yet exalted by her faith. His life did look common, mean, and poor from this new plane, but for the first time it had possibilities in it. As Penrose had declared she loved him, simply as people might say it in another existence, so he felt that he loved her; but it meant some-

thing entirely different from any sentiment he had called by that name before. He did not know that it needed, or that he even wished it, to develop into anything beyond friendship. There was nothing of passion or desire in his mood. He liked to clasp her warm strong hand—it had become the dearest and the kindest hand to him—but he did not want to take her into his arms and to kiss her. They stood in a pure, keen, and rarified air, in which the softer sensations had no existence. If he were in any sense her lover it was not as he had been Viola's, yet he was certain of one thing, that to lose her out of his life would be bitter as death, and that to live now outside of her faith and affection would be to lead a starved and forlorn existence. This thought formed itself into words.

"You'll never leave off caring for me, Penrose, whatever happens, will you?"

The pressure of her hand tightened on his.

"*Never*," she said; and the fervent low voice had in it the promise of a lifetime.

CHAPTER II.

JANE and Penrose took alternate nights for sleeping in Mrs. Trevenna's room. Penrose was off duty, but she went softly into the silent chamber, on her return home, to see if all was right. Her mother was asleep. Some nights she was perfectly tranquil, while on others she was restless and excited. It was one o'clock and past when Penrose shut the door and sat down on the edge of her little bed without taking off her hat and jacket, she felt she must be still and think, her heart was throbbing so fast and her pulses in a tumult. She wanted to know

why. What had happened? Something or nothing?

Yes, surely something. She had entered upon a bond of friendship, close, dear, and true. It was friendship. Only that—only that, of course. At least on his side, she was quite sure; but on hers? What about that? This was the first question that stillness and night must solve. It was well to know, to have no false glamour on things, to be convinced.

"I never was in love, I never thought of such things; it never came my way; I believed it never would. Now and then at Redwood Mr. Bracy said a word or two differently somehow from the rest, and it crossed my mind that, perhaps, he thought he liked me. But it never seemed possible to me. I was not made for men to care for. I am not soft and beautiful and caressing. No, it cannot be, it can never be."

She sat quite still, pale, motionless; her

eyes were fixed without seeing anything on the dingily papered, dully lighted wall opposite her, in the plainly furnished small London bedroom, her hands clasped round her knees. She could never have guessed in the proud humility of her self-inspection how noble her fixed face, with the look of intense self-communing on it, was. There was no one to see it, and no one had ever yet seen its very noblest. It must be often so with characters that have no guile and no skill in appearing other than they are. She paused on the decision to which her mind had come, that she was not made to be beloved of men, and though the thought had its bitterness, as it must have for every woman thus bidden to stand alone, she had never yet shrunk from any bitter draught that life had held to her lips. If she were made thus, well, she could not help it, she could bear to know that the treasure within her was unclaimed and undesired.

"But I can love; I am not ashamed. It is true. I felt it in my heart to-night that I love him, and I *will* love him, no one better, to the end of time, perhaps beyond it. He may never find it out, he may never *want* to find it out; but it is there, it is his. My dear, my darling; yes, it is true; I love you!"

A warm glow spread over the paleness of her face; she started to her feet, and held up her arms. It was only empty air that she embraced; but the delusion was strong, and for a moment it seemed to Penrose as if she touched and clasped some human presence, holding it close to her breast. The rush of her blood, the spring of her heart were so strong that they swept away the coldness of her humility, the customary moods of her solitary life, in one great flood-tide of feeling. Perhaps she was wrong in that judgment of herself; perhaps all glorious possibilities were true; perhaps, after all,

she, *she*, too, might taste the new wine of love and joy!

Oh, how divine life might be if it were granted one to pour out the secret riches of an over-full heart, like the precious ointment on the feet of the beloved. To be permitted to bestow—this was all Penrose asked of God.

She had no selfish hunger of egotism to satisfy, no desire to be the first—only to give, and give without stint, as she knew it was in her to give; not to calculate and weigh the return, but to pour the heaped-up, pressed-down, ungrudged, overflowing abundance of the measure of the love she had in her to bestow into the bosom that was opened to receive it.

"If I might be a wife—a mother! I am not good enough; but who is? Never to be cold and empty, and lonely any more! Oh, my God, my God, might it be possible?"

The cold reaction came, as it too often

does, quick on the glow and glory of the moment; her arms felt their emptiness again, and dropped down at her side. There was no presence there, nothing but the quivering throb of her own being.

"I was not born to be so happy," she said aloud, and the words fell on her ear as if some judge had spoken them, and pronounced her sentence. And with the chill the vision of Viola had come before the eyes of her mind.

The sad bewildered look which even the distance between them had not entirely concealed on the delicate, pale, white-flower face, the listless attitude which Penrose fancied seemed to shrink away from the pronounced attention of her wooer—she could not forget these, or get rid of the strong impression they had made on her compassion. Viola was unhappy, Viola still cared for Geoffrey, possibly, and it did not do to think of Viola as suffering. She was so frail, it was much easier to be

lonely and sad one's self, when one was strong, vigorous, and of high courage, than even to think of any one so little formed for suffering being exposed to a cruel wind of Fortune.

"They will meet again—they will come together again—she cares for him, not for that other man. I can still love him, no one can prevent that."

She put away from her, not sternly and coldly, but with the sadness and tenderness with which a woman lays a dead child out of her arms, the golden vision of joy which for a moment had filled her soul and transfigured the future. The commonplace self-sacrifice, which was her portion, had returned upon her with all the dull demands of duty.

She must no longer linger dreaming, as foolish maidens dream, of impossible bliss, of lover's love, and husband's love, of all the rosy triumphs of youth in the pride of beauty. She began calmly and

prosaically to undress, to put away with mechanical neatness, to prepare for her rest. It is easy enough to lie down, however, in the dark, and to shut one's eyes, not so easy to rest. *That* needs a tranquil and untroubled spirit, and hers had been too highly wrought up to be quiet. She looked backwards and forwards, and like the raven out of the ark, her heart found no place of repose. The years of childhood had not been exactly happy years, she had had few of the eager pleasures of the time, but they were the most peaceful memories she had. Her girlhood had been barer still of joy, and the last year had brought pain on pain.

She was ashamed of herself for the heaviness of her spirit as she looked on into the future. She had little hope of her mother's recovery, she felt a sort of conviction that this condition of slowly creeping mental alienation, the dull paralysis of will and heart, would increase,

and take from her even that one possession of hers, her mother's undemonstrative but clinging affection. Already her mother seemed quite indifferent whether Jane or Penrose were with her. Yet she would need all the more care and love if she could not make any active demand for it. Penrose would be staunch to her whatever happened—the most loyal and tender of daughters, but there would be no return, it could not bring any actual response. There was the interest of pursuing art, that might be much to her; there was the stronger human interest in trying a little to lighten the burdens of the wretched. Life might be full of work, and of absorbing work too; it was weak and selfish to return so persistently to-night upon the woman's need, which had never before pressed itself upon her heart.

There are thousands of women, good, strong and loving, to whom Fate has said,

"You must stand alone." She was surely able to bear it, she was no whining egotist, craving a special gift that was not hers by right. Her eyes were hot and tired, the panorama which passed and repassed wearied her, and rest was long in coming, but the strong wrestling for patience and courage was not in vain. At last she conquered the struggling desires and passionate disturbance which had laid hold of her, and "Nature's soft nurse" rocked her to sleep. She woke at her usual time, though she had watched so late, and got up dutifully, if heavily, to bear the charges of another day. When she was dressed she went to her mother's room. Jane had just brought in the daintily prepared breakfast-tray—Mrs. Trevenna's feeble appetite needed constant coaxing. She looked up a little more alertly than usual, as Penrose came near her to kiss her and ask after her state.

"Well, child," she said, smiling feebly

at her, "Jane says you went to the play. Did you enjoy it?"

Something in the childish question affected Penrose oddly, her mother so seldom now cared to ask anything about her doings and goings. She found her voice a little choked; but she cleared it, to answer briskly, in a matter-of-fact way. Oh yes, she had enjoyed it very much, of course; though she had not altogether liked the play—it was very well acted.

"And who was it went with you?"

"Geoffrey Trevenna, mother."

"Geoffrey Trevenna?" Her mother looked a little puzzled, as if she had to search for the idea connected with him. "Oh yes, to be sure. Geoffrey—yes. Is he coming to see me to-day?"

"I don't know, mother. I think not."

"And was he pleasant? You like him, don't you, Pen?"

"Yes, mother." Penrose spoke a little quickly, and drew her breath fast. Jane's

dark eyes glanced sharply at her for a moment.

"You are better to-day, aren't you, dear?" Penrose went on softly. "You look better."

"Oh yes, I am better. Perhaps I shall get quite well again. Some one—I forget whether it was you or Jane or the doctor—was talking about my going travelling, and seeing all sorts of places; but don't take me to foreign countries, Pen, don't! I don't like France. I've been to France, you know, to Paris, with your—with Mr.—you know who I mean. I wasn't happy there, and I hate being on the sea, though I love to be by it. I was thinking, Pen, if I have to go anywhere——"

She paused, as she had a habit of doing when she had been talking more than usual, suddenly, as if she had lost the thread of it, and the puzzled look returned.

"Yes, mother dear, where would you like to go?"

Penrose was sitting on the bed, feeding her mother as if she were a sick baby, watching her. Jane stood silent, looking at them both, with the hard outside which covered the loving vigilance beneath.

"I don't quite remember the name—where we went last year."

"To Cornwall?"

"Ay. I was a Cornish girl, you know, Pen. One has a hankering sometimes after one's own county. When I'm better still, perhaps we might go to Cornwall for a change."

She seldom, if ever, even alluded to Redwood; either she had forgotten the winter of her life there, or she disliked and avoided the subject. Now and then she was quite alive to her surroundings and interested in the little affairs of her day; but at times, the present seemed to mingle with her early past, and the intermediate years slipped away. Then she

would talk about the childish events that she had seemed to forget, about her games on the beach, the things her father and mother had said, her girl and boy friends, the little local allusions of a trivial sort which make up the interests of an ignorant country girl. With it all the great event, the fall and disaster of her life never seemed to mingle. She never let a word escape her which had to do with her relations to Richard Trevenna directly. It often puzzled and troubled the rigid Methodist conscience of her sister to reflect that "Molly"— who was still and always the irresponsible young sister of the past—had never "showed any penitence." The idea of sin and loss never appeared connected in her mind with Penrose. It was strange, it was rather terrifying, seen in the light of Jane Chegwidden's stern theology, yet her human heart rose rebellious against the fear of future retribution. She prayed incessantly

that it might not be visited on poor Molly.

"Dear Lord," her soul cried to the One who seemed awfully near and real to her when she was alone with Him—"dear Lord, Thou knowest there are folks made so different that they can't be held responsible like them as *feel* sin and do it all the same. She was made so easy, any one could guide her right or wrong, and she was guided wrong. She was never wicked, only weak, dear Lord, it'd have been a lot more wicked in me if I'd gone wrong, for I always had a conviction of sin, and she's suffered, Thou knowest; only in middle age now, and like an old woman in body and a child in mind; and before that she suffered. Take it into account, and wipe that one blackness off her, good Lord, in Jesus' name!"

Such, or such-like, was Jane's constant cry when she shut herself up and gave

her soul to prayer. It comforted her to lay the case before this invisible Judge and plead for her "little sister." Her tongue was tied in any human presence, and she went on stoically with her quiet stern air of deliberate self-constraint which yielded into kindness when "Molly" made demands upon it. There was a great deal in common between her nature and Penrose's, only the latter's was deeper, more complex, richer, refined out of the rough ore into virgin gold. It was curious how the fluid soft nature of Mrs. Trevenna, which would willingly have hurt nothing, had caused the stronger, finer spirits to suffer with whom her life had been bound up. They had borne that sin of hers, which had never seemed terrible to her own conscience, vicariously, and that very conviction of it had given only a profounder tenderness and compassion to their thoughts of her.

When Mrs. Trevenna had finished her

breakfast, Jane and Penrose took theirs together. Penrose had insisted upon this, though Jane would have kept up her servant attitude, even in these quiet lodgings, if she had been permitted. As it was, she would never presume on her relationship to put on any authority or familiarity. Her manner to her niece was always gentle, considerate, almost respectful, as it was to no other person upon earth. She loved her with a secret depth and force, which she hardly realized to herself; but it is a simple fact that she would any day have laid down her life for her. She studied her ways of thought, was quick to see every passing change of feeling, and, though she expressed little, nothing that she could understand escaped her. She said suddenly and abruptly, when they had finished breakfast, just before she rose to return to her charge—

"Penrose, my dear, I never thought of it before, but I'm not settled in

my mind as it will do for you to go about alone, as you do, with Mr. Geoffrey."

She was surprised, startled, almost dismayed to see the flood of painful crimson that spread over the girl's face, though the grey eyes met her dauntlessly, and the voice was proud and steady.

"What can you mean?"

"Well, I never had such an idea myself—I know you hadn't—but we've never lived in the world, my dear—you as little as me. The woman at the house here asked if so be you two were sweethearting."

"You said, of course, that we were cousins." The crimson had slowly sank, and Penrose was pale enough again.

Jane shrugged her shoulders, with an expressive gesture. "Cousins! Ay, I said so; but what are cousins? Don't be

mad with me for telling you, now! That's how folks talk when a handsome young fellow and a fine girl like you go about in couples. It don't do for them to have a word to say about you—I hate it. Whether you're angry or not, I can't help it. I think you'd better not do it, Penrose."

Penrose, sore as she felt, could almost have laughed at the idea of uncompromising Jane Chegwidden forming the mouthpiece of Mrs. Grundy.

"If it is necessary for me to go anywhere with Geoffrey Trevenna, I shall," she said, almost fiercely; "but, as to the rest, I shan't offend your notions of propriety. What does it matter to me what people say? Sweethearting! Am I a likely subject for *that?*"

"And why not, pray?" Jane retorted as fiercely. "Who's got a better sweetheart than you'd be, I'd like to know? You make me real cross, talking like that!

Folks'd think you was ugly, or had something wrong with you—a fine, straight, handsome maid as ever breathed, outside and in. I only wish I knew a man worth your spending a thought on! If there was such, and you fancied him—I'm not ashamed of saying I'd be ready to cry for joy to think of my child being a happy wife, after all. And, just because of that, I'll not be having you go out alone with that Trevenna, to be talked about, when it means nought to him."

"So, after all, you're a match-maker too!" Penrose smiled a little, but it was not her usual frank, bright smile. "I did not suspect you of it. Poor Jane! I'm afraid I shall never make you happy that way. I shall not marry."

"Hold your tongue," Jane cried angrily, clattering the plates together into a pile, with the mechanical habit of servitude, as she rose from her seat. "As if you could tell what the Lord intends you to be!

You're a fool to think so low of yourself, Penrose ; for folks take a body at her own value, mind that !" She went out of the room abruptly.

CHAPTER III.

PENROSE felt somehow oddly lazy and aimless that day. It was not one on which she went to the studio, and she was not inclined to find herself any work. She felt as if she needed movement, exercise, change of thought; it was too quiet and monotonous at home, where her mother sat by the window looking out, now and then making some childish remark about what she saw, and Jane sewed or waited on her, for the most part in her ordinary silence. Penrose went out into the bright June day, and drew in a balmy air that might have blown over a hay-field instead of that waste of streets.

She felt restless, and her mind would not be still. A stir of vague expectation of some coming event moved within her, and unsettled the moods of her mind. She decided, after a few moments' hesitation, that she would make a second visit to the Royal Academy—where she had gone with Mrs. Morrison before—she wanted to see one or two of the pictures again that had attracted her. Here, on this common meeting-ground for all the world, she ran against an old friend. As she entered the long gallery something oddly familiar in a figure at some little distance made her look again. A small, thin, shrunken but upright elderly lady, quaintly and unbecomingly dressed in a very short skirt, which allowed plenty of her thick country-made boots and a little of white stockings to be visible, a mantle of the cut of twenty years ago, and a bonnet, surmounted by a nodding plume, which was suggestive of her days of childhood

to Penrose, and brought up a vision of a high pew in Copsley Church—now "restored" away—over which it used to perk with self-assertion, a little subdued now by years—in short, Miss Babb!

The spinster turned abruptly, with a sharp remonstrance at that moment.

"Young man, are you aware you have trodden on my toes!"

The young man apologized, with a twinkle of fun, and Miss Babb's sharp eyes travelled on.

"Lord bless me, if it isn't Penrose Hall!" was her next very audible exclamation. And Penrose and she met face to face.

Penrose was quietly cordial. Miss Babb had been kind to her, after her fashion, in the days when kindness went far with her, and she was glad to see her, though she could not help shrinking from the flood of questions that came pouring out.

"Just to think of meeting you! Where

on earth are you staying? How is your mother? Where do you live now? Have you left that place near Oxford? Well, I *am* surprised! Come and sit down here a bit, out of this crush, and tell me all about yourself."

She grasped Penrose's arm, and drew her to a seat. One or two bystanders smiled at the loud imperative tones of the rustic-looking old lady; but that did not trouble Penrose.

"Dear Miss Babb, I am glad to see you again," she said warmly, so warmly as to turn the other's eager curiosity into something more affectionate. "What are *you* doing in London? You don't often come here, do you?"

"No, I don't. I hate the great horrid place; but I had a little business—with a dentist, in fact. The Copsley man's a fool, as you know, or perhaps you don't," she added, glancing at the white teeth which had never been tortured. "Any-

way, he is. So I accepted my niece, Mrs. Norman's, invitation to pay her a visit. You may have heard me speak of my niece, Julia Norman—a very genteel woman, moving in a first-rate circle, a large house, and every comfort. She was prevented coming with me, so I ventured into this Babel alone, and she'll call for me. But now tell me all about yourself, Penrose. Of course I've heard something from the Folliotts. Your mother is Mrs. Trevenna now. Have you taken that name?"

"Yes," Penrose answered calmly. She knew Miss Babb of old. Her curiosity was much greater than her tact, and, at times, than her benevolence; it must be satisfied. "I am called Trevenna too."

"And do you live at that place in Oxfordshire, or have you left it?"

"Only for a time. We are in London for my mother to be under a physician. She is not strong, but is better."

"What's the matter with her? She always seemed a poor creature, I thought. She looked much more than her age, and hadn't half my strength, and I'm going on for eighty; but all the Babbs are long-lived. My father was ninety-five when he died."

It crossed Penrose's mind to wonder at the old lady's complacency over the idea of lengthening out that small dull life of hers for another fifteen years; but it was evident enough.

"No, my mother was never strong," she said, sighing; "but she is much altered since you saw her."

"And that's more than a year ago now. H'm, it was a queer affair! I don't want to say anything to hurt you, my dear, I always had a regard for you; but it did astonish me. Such a quiet sort of woman as your mother seemed. Dear, dear, one does get startled by people's goings on sometimes. Would you believe it, that

respectable seeming Mrs. Elder, the butcher's widow, married a mere boy a few months after her husband's death, and her own children won't have anything to do with her? It shocked and surprised me almost as much as—ahem—I don't want to say a word to hurt you, but—— So your mother is ill? Ah, well; but I'm sure it's no fault of *yours*, and I always was fond of you, Penrose. A nice little girl, you were. How you did delight to rummage out my piece drawer to find frocks for your dolls. I did miss you when you—when you *disappeared*, as I may say! And to think of your mother —that quiet Mrs. Hall, as we called her——"

"Dear Miss Babb, you must please not discuss my mother to me," Penrose said, trying to keep her voice gentle.

There was never any use in being angry with Miss Babb. She could not be different from what Nature had made her.

Penrose had lived all her life with people who needed large allowances, and, after all, it was a refreshment to a mind faithful and constant to every memory to see the old familiar if unlovely visage.

"My dear," the old lady returned, tossing her head, "you needn't take me to task. I've said nothing, and I wasn't going to say anything to hurt you. You must allow it was a surprise—ahem—and a disappearance; that's all I observe. And you came in for a heap of money, so Mrs. Folliott told me. Now, do tell me how much?"

The question might have seemed an impertinent one enough to some; but it was not the sort to offend the direct simplicity of Penrose's frankness. Why should not the inquisitive old lady ask outright the thing she wanted to know?

"Yes, it is a great deal. We have, I suppose, more than three thousand pounds a year, besides the house. It does seem

almost more than we know what to do with. Dear Miss Babb, if there's anything—I mean, if there's any scheme, any charity that you are interested in, and you would tell me, I should be so glad, and so would mother."

"To be sure, my dear," Miss Babb returned promptly and instantly, "and that I quite believe. It must be a privilege for you to give freely out of your abundance. I've no hesitation in asking for a donation of ten pounds or so from you for my mission sale. It will give me a great pull over that bragging upstart Mrs. Parkes—only a grocer's widow just set up in fine style in Copsley, and giving to everything—for I know she has been boasting that she has twice the things I have, and I could lay it out nicely in London."

"To be sure! Yes, I will send you ten pounds with pleasure. But for yourself. I wish I knew anything you very much

wanted for yourself or your house, Miss Babb."

"You're very kind, my love," Miss Babb said, in a voice of more softness than was usual to her. "You're not one of those who forget old times and old friends. Well, if you won't think me greedy, Penrose, I own I should like a black satin gown to wear at this sale of work. I'm not rich, you know, my dear, and though a good dress still, my brown silk is just a leetle bit past its best days."

Penrose quite agreed inwardly in this judgment. She had early associations with that brown silk that had come out of the depths of a wardrobe and many folds of tissue paper on all high days and holidays since first the little girl had visited the old lady. The uncomplaining self-denial and daily thrift of the narrow cheerful life, had always seemed at once touching and admirable to her in spite of its blemishes. She was glad to think

of so agreeable a bit of shopping as the purchase of a handsome piece of black satin to delight her old friend's heart with. Miss Babb chatted on for half an hour, fishing for an invitation to Penrose's present abode, which the girl dared not give. The agitation of any such remembrance of Copsley days might be bad for her mother. At last, when Miss Babb got too direct, Penrose told her frankly she dared not risk the meeting.

Miss Babb had reluctantly to give up the idea. She next asked about Jane, whom she spoke of in a tone of some disfavour. Jane had been too independent in manner and too reticent to suit her.

"I suppose she is still with you?"

"Oh yes, she will always be with us. Mother could not get on without her, nor could I."

"Dear! That's odd. You talk as if she were more than a servant."

"So she is, Miss Babb," Penrose said,

a little proudly. "You don't know what Jane is. She is not our servant at all."

She longed to tell the whole truth, but Jane was always strong in her objections to that, and such a bit of news in Miss Babb's keeping would go far.

"Ah, well," the old lady said dryly, "I like people to keep their place; but you know best of course. Dear me, it's four o'clock! I was to meet Mrs. Norman outside at that hour. She keeps a brougham, and jobs a horse for the season. It's really delightful—such a change from the Copsley fly! Will you come down with me to the door? There's such a crowd, I should be glad of your arm."

As they moved towards the staircase, the quaint rustic figure of the old maid clinging to the tall strong young one beside her, Penrose asked her to give messages of remembrance to one or two of the

people at Copsley who would care to hear of her. She had written once or twice to her old artist friend, who had not got over her loss. A few people looked at the couple with some amusement, of which each was utterly unconscious.

"What figures of fun one sees at the R.A.!" one girl said to another. "Look at that old guy. Did you ever see such a bonnet? Just imported from the wilds."

"The girl with her is rather handsome. What a mass of hair! She looks artistic."

"And dowdy. Not a bit of style. What a big waist!" The young lady, whose own proportions were so wasp-like that to see her was to gasp involuntarily in sympathy with her imprisoned breath, with one glance of sovereign contempt at Penrose's straight stately form, passed on to further criticism of art and nature.

Outside was the usual row of carriages waiting. Miss Babb peered up and down for Mrs. Norman's brougham, which was a little difficult to distinguish from the rest, as she only knew the horse was "brown," and the coachman "rather a sandy man."

They walked beside the row nearly to the entrance, where they discovered the brougham in question at the end. While Penrose was putting her old friend in and saying good-bye, a victoria drove in and stopped just behind, and a loud, assertive man's voice caught her ear, saying—

"Then, if you will be good enough to drop me here, Viola, I'll go in, and see about buying that picture."

The name was quite distinct; the speaker did not seem at all anxious to drop his voice, every one was welcome to hear what he had to say.

Penrose stood back and gazed fixedly at the occupants of the carriage. The slender,

pale, pretty girl leaning amongst the cushions, met her eyes suddenly and stared back at her, and in a moment recognition flashed between them. Something in Penrose's face, something cold, reproachful, yet infinitely sad it was that arrested Viola's eyes and made her sure who it was who looked at her thus strangely. The gentleman who was heavily descending on to the pavement was Mr. Lees. Penrose remembered the red hair, the ponderous figure, the air of supreme content with self and surroundings as he pulled his frock coat, with its costly button-hole, into place with his great gloved hands and with a nod of farewell moved away. As he did so Viola started forward imperatively ordering the coachman to stop a minute, and called to Penrose in a quivering low voice.

"Miss Trevenna! It *is* Miss Trevenna. Don't, please, don't go away, I must see you—I must. Please get in, and

let me drive you somewhere where we can talk. Don't refuse me."

Her voice drew Penrose as with a magnet. She silently stepped in beside her. Viola laid a small hand, burning through its delicate glove, on hers, and kept it pressed there.

"You are not in a hurry? You don't care where we go?"

"No, I am not in a hurry. But Mr. —that gentleman—are you not waiting for him?"

"No. He has another appointment. Drive on, Charles."

"Where to, ma'am? The Park?"

"No. Along the Fulham Road."

The carriage moved on, down Piccadilly. It was here that Penrose had first met Viola Field, though neither then had taken in one remembrance of the other, it was here that Penrose had perhaps saved the other's life, had certainly risked her own.

Viola recalled it in the first words she spoke again, in her low and trembling voice.

"You stopped my ponies here, do you remember? It was the day after—I mean, a day I can't forget. How brave it was of you. But it would perhaps have been better if you had not—a fall on my head might have been the best thing, after all." She gave the strangest, saddest little laugh.

Penrose looked straight at her, with perplexed inquiring eyes. She took in the subtle melancholy change that less than a year had wrought; the increased and painful fragility of her face, figure, and bearing, the feverish brilliancy of the deep blue eyes, the quiver of the sweet, weak mouth, the little hollows in cheek and temple, the violet tracery of the veins.

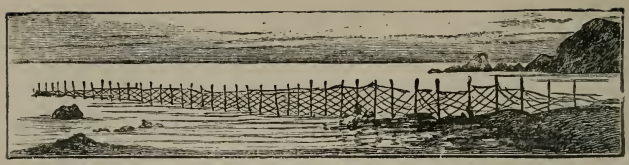
"Are you ill?" she said gently.

"No; miserable," Viola returned, with a sudden flush of strange fierceness. "Wait a moment till we are in a quieter place. I have got to tell you some things—directly I saw you, I knew I must. Don't ask me anything more, don't say a word till I begin."

She fell back as if no longer able to keep her body erect, and let her eyelids drop over her eyes. She still kept her clutch on her companion's hand, one almost painful, but Penrose was careless of the stress. She waited with a heart that swelled within her with a rush of overpowering pity.

Resentment and contempt were gone, the old compassionate tenderness of her feeling for one so pretty, so frail, so pathetically appealing overwhelmed and drove out every other sensation. A strange magnetism held the two girls together, they met as if they had been known to each other intimately for years, and neither

could have defined the power which forced them thus into communion, soul with soul, as we meet only now and then in a whole lifetime.



CHAPTER IV.

VIOLA suddenly opened her eyes again, and looked hard at Penrose. The victoria was moving slowly along and had reached a less frequented part. She seemed to be nerving herself to a great effort, and, as if to help her, that tiny thin hand of hers gripped hard and fast on the larger, firmer, cooler one beneath it. Her lips moved once or twice, and after a moment formed words, abrupt words jerked out with an attempt at recklessness quite alien to the girl who spoke them.

"You must think I'm mad—and indeed, at times, I almost feel so. I have no right

at all to seize upon you like this, and force you into my confidence. I know perfectly well I have no right—indeed, I hardly know what makes me—something in your look, your touch, your eyes, I can't tell what; but it draws me to say what I have not been able to say before, which has been eating, eating at my heart since I came home!"

Her other hand went with a convulsive, fluttering little motion to her side. She clenched it, and pressed it against her as if to relieve some urgent physical pain.

"I felt the same—something the same, only not so strongly, when I met you at St. Par's, when you put your arm round me and lifted me up in such a strange gentle way. Yes, I felt it, but not as now—because I was happy then—you could not do anything for me. It was *you* who seemed lonely and a little sad, I thought, though as if you could bear

anything without complaining. Now it is I that am lonely, and not a little—oh, not a little sad, but as sad and heavy at heart as a girl can be."

"Oh, not truly—not truly! You surely don't mean it?"

Viola kept her eyes—they were very dry and bright, but the pain in them seemed to show more intensely on that account—fixed on Penrose's face, which was full to overflowing of sympathy.

"Yes, it is true," she said, nodding, with a strange little bitter smile—"quite true. What surprises you in it? Perhaps you have seen Geoffrey"—the name came out chokingly—"and he told you what he fancied about me; that I was going to marry a rich man for his money, and that *that* made me happy! Perhaps you had been supposing me a frivolous, light-hearted jilt, who only cared for Geoffrey as long as he had money, or prospects of money, and who did not feel it at all when

it was broken off between us. That is what my father would like people to believe! Oh," she cried, with sudden fierce intensity, "I *hate* my father. I *hate* Mr. Lees. I hate everybody!"

"You! You *hate* people. *You?*"

"Why not? I am bad enough for anything; fool enough, beast enough! What do you know about bad people like me? You good, pure, *strong* woman —yes, that is everything, to be strong— it is my weakness that has spoilt my life. I let them take it in their clumsy hands, and maul and hurt it. If I were like you, I might be happy, and have Geoffrey belonging to me still."

"Then you did not leave off caring for him? You do love him still?" Penrose said, just above her breath.

"Love him! I should think so—base, mean, paltry, detestable as I am, I could no more let go of that—— It was the one thing in me that made me a little different

from other vain, silly, idiots of girls, the one strong feeling that just lifted me out of the mud, and they robbed me of that, between them."

"How could they, if you cared for him?"

"How could they? Oh, you would understand if you were like me! As it is, you never can, so you must despise me. I cannot help that. I should be glad though if you could only like me a little, Miss—no, I can't give you that name, it does not seem to belong to you—I must call you *Penrose*. Geoffrey wrote to me about Penrose."

"I can like—I can *love* you," Penrose said, in her strong, warm, deep voice, the grip on her hand had relaxed, and she it was now who took and held the other's, with a soft, supporting tenderness. "I wish you could be sure of that, dear, and make me understand what it was that really brought you to do this."

Viola shook her head. "I do not believe I can make you understand. You and I speak a different tongue, and live in different countries. From a baby I've been brought up to have whatever I wanted, and to want whatever cost money. It was my education, the creed they taught me, that it was enough to ask, and to have—that Vi must not be thwarted, Vi must not suffer, Vi must be wrapped up in rose-leaves! And now, after all, in spite of all"— she gave a wild little laugh —"Vi *does* suffer horribly, Vi does want, with her whole heart, what she can't have! Oh, I *want* Geoffrey, and he is gone out of my reach. That was what my life was, Penrose, my daily lesson—and yours was, must have been, as wide apart from it as the poles. Some one, or something taught you to be brave and self-denying, to be able to do without luxuries and pleasures such as were daily bread to me—daily bread! No, *my* food was cake and

wine, like the bad girl in the fairy tale, and it has all turned to ashes."

"But why did you let them persuade you into this engagement with a man you say you hate?" Penrose insisted, with grave directness that would not be put off with half answers.

Viola writhed. "How can I tell you? I don't know myself. It was just that I did not seem to care what happened after Geoffrey wrote me that cold letter and gave me up. They all beset me at once. My mother told me day and night that I should be miserable in a poor marriage —that I did not know what it meant to be denied the things I had always had— that it would kill me and break her heart. My father talked and talked till I was dazed and tired. Mrs. Williams—Mr. Lees—it was all of them against me, and I was so weak and so worn out." She paused a moment, her hand fluttered in Penrose's as if it wished to escape her

grasp. She turned her head away. "There was another reason. They all said he was tired of me—I was not surprised—that you—that you and he were great friends, that if he married you"—every word came out separately, with little breathless gasps—"he would have Redwood, after all."

"And you *believed* it!" Penrose cried, in a strong voice full of wrath, "Oh, you poor, weak, foolish, jealous child! Geoffrey and I are friends—aren't you able to understand that a man may have a woman friend?—but he no more loves me—no more wants to marry me than if I were a nun. You have hurt him so that perhaps he may think he does not care for you any longer; but I am sure he does—yes, I am sure! Can't you believe in me? Can't you know that I am speaking the truth? Look in my face and see."

"I believe you," Viola said under her breath; but she did not turn her head, she

lay back as if her own emotion had completely exhausted her. The pink flush had faded, her face was perfectly white, and her mouth drooped at the corners as if it had forgotten how to smile. There was a long silence; then, as the coachman looked back for orders, she said listlessly, "Turn back now and drive towards home."

After they had turned, she said again, in a dull dragging tone, more tired than anything else. "Well, it is done, I suppose. One can't go back. I quite see that it is my own fault, or the fault of Nature that made me such a weak fool. I believe you; but that cannot make much difference now. I felt I must tell you; but I don't know what good it can do me, and now I have succeeded only in getting your contempt."

"Oh no," Penrose cried, with a return to her former tone. "I don't condemn you. If I was angry for a moment to think that you could be deceived so about

his feeling for me, it is all over. I only want to make you see that it can come right yet."

"Never. Oh, never!"

"I say it can—it shall. You will not be so wicked—I will not call it weak, it is *wicked*—as to marry a man you say you hate, a man like that, *for money!* Viola, it seems to me the most hateful, the meanest, falsest, most degrading thing a woman can do to sell herself like that! And while you care still for Geoffrey it is more—it is a crime."

"But they will make me do it—I cannot face it all."

"You can—you must."

"While you speak I feel as if I could," Viola said, with a faint dim smile; "but I know they will be too strong for me—Fate is too strong. I feel all the time as if there were a net drawn over my head and closing, closing round me. Feeble things, like me, have no escape possible."

There was a moment's silence, then Viola said listlessly—

"Where are you staying?" Penrose told her. "Then I will drive you there first. I have nothing to do. If you will let me, I will come in to see your mother."

"My mother is not at all strong," Penrose said hesitatingly; "it will not be a pleasant visit for you."

"Do you mind my coming?"

"No. Oh no! If—if your mother would wish it."

"What do you mean?" Viola asked, rousing herself to vague surprise and staring at her. Then as the colour rose in Penrose's face, a faint flush came into Viola's pale cheeks. "Of course she would not mind. Penrose, do not hold me at arm's length. I want you for a friend—be good to me."

"I have not much power of befriending or helping any one, I am afraid," Penrose answered, a little sadly; but her eyes were

full of kindness. "I thought you knew that I would be glad to do what I could for you."

"If only you could give me some of *yourself*, a little of your courage! If only I dared do what you tell me I ought, if I could but bring back the days of last year! I am not very old; but I feel as if all my good days were gone and done with."

"You are talking nonsense!" Penrose said sternly, almost harshly; "you are making your own fate. Your father and mother love you. Don't you suppose they want you to be happy?"

"Yes; but in their way."

"Then do not let them meddle with your life. Oh, I know that may sound wrong—perhaps I have cared too little for other people's wills—but one's life is one's own, no one else's—one's life and one's soul. You must take it out of their hands, out of their reach; you have a right, a supreme right. Viola, Viola, don't

let *any* one, not your very nearest and dearest, stand between you and your soul. Don't sell it for Mr. Lees' thousands. Better work for bread, better go poor all the days of your life, than stoop to such a depth as that."

"If I can—if I dare. Oh, I don't know what to do! I feel benumbed, as if nothing could save me now."

"You poor little thing!" The words, though gentle, were half-contemptuous; but Penrose's hand closed on the trembling little fingers, and kept them in that strong warm hold that seemed to have a magnetic power over the faltering will.

Viola lay back on the cushions, and let her eyelids fall wearily over the bright but pathetic eyes. Something of rest and peace crept over her face. She was not fully conscious of any sensation but that of a tired-out child who is softly cradled and rocked on its mother's knee. She did not attempt to analyze the force

which Penrose's individuality had over her. She only felt it, and was soothed by the strength of the nature she could not understand.

Penrose said no more. What could she say? How could she deal with experiences, with people so altogether foreign to her? It was true that she and Viola inhabited different worlds, that their paths diverged as widely as is possible. She had no words, no argument left to force this girl into the assertion of a nobler course than that to which her earliest bringing up had pledged her.

And some secret whisper at the deepest depth of her own heart would be heard when she paused in thought. This said, with persistent truthfulness, that, after all, it might be best—best for Geoffrey, best for herself, if Viola never dared escape the future which she had allowed herself to invite! Penrose knew, for she was as relentlessly truthful to herself as to others

that she could love Geoffrey, if he would let her, with a passion and a strength that Viola could never come within miles of, and that he and she together might win a world which was hopelessly beyond Viola's attaining. But she would utter no syllable that was not true; no, not if it meant an entrance into Paradise.

Viola said no more on any subject below the surface. She seemed almost terrified at her own abandon. After a few minutes' complete silence, she roused herself to talk in her usual tone about some trivial subject. She sent emotion back into "memory's darkest hold," and was the Viola that the world knew for the rest of the drive. She told the coachman to wait for her at the door of Mrs. Trevenna's lodgings, went upstairs to be introduced to Penrose's mother, who received her with a sort of vague embarrassment, and seemed to have little to say in answer to the sweet, courteous inquiries of the

beautifully dressed, pretty young lady visitor, who puzzled and confused her completely.

"Who do you say it is, Pen?" Mrs. Trevenna whispered, catching hold of her daughter's sleeve to draw her down to hear. "And where can you have met her?"

"It is Miss Field, mother. You have heard me speak of her. We met at the Academy, and she drove me home."

"Miss Field? Isn't that Geoffrey's——" The loud whisper reached Viola, and the hectic pink flew into her face in a moment. "The one who—— Aren't they engaged?"

Penrose went calmly on speaking, without seeming to hear these questions, telling her mother of the meeting with Miss Babb. *That* remembrance, too, might have its embarrassing connection; but anything was better than to let the slow mind revolve the former question. At

first Mrs. Trevenna seemed to have forgotten who Miss Babb was, to have lost all the old threads of memory altogether; but the name confusedly suggested others, and she seemed to have some recollections of Copsley, which in their turn brought other reminiscences into the confusion of her mind, older but more vivid. She began to ramble about Pen's childhood, of what a clever little thing she was, of how she learnt to read and write no one knew how, and could draw the funniest little pictures before she was six.

Viola glanced round the room, comfortable enough for a London lodging-house, but unbeautiful, unluxurious; at the pale vacant face amongst the pillows of the reclining chair. This was what Penrose could call home, this was her mother, the object of all her care, the one to whom she devoted her time, her tenderness! An uninviting life, an unattractive subject for love, yet they sufficed to make her what

she was, strong to do, brave to dare, large-hearted, loving, self-sacrificing. One sees sometimes the finest, most fragrant rose growing, unaided by care, in the meagre garden of a cottage, of which a millionaire might boast. Viola could envy the girl thus handicapped by Fate. She envied her the very qualities which were hopelessly beyond her own reach, the strength that hardship could never crush, the courage that dared to be true to itself, and therefore false to no one.

She did not stay long. As she wished Mrs. Trevenna good-bye, the invalid held her hand and looked at her, smiling in a feeble sort of way.

"You'll come and see me again, my dear? I get so few visitors; it's quite a pleasure looking at a pretty face like yours!"

The expansiveness surprised Penrose, used to her mother's shy, awkward manner, cold out of very inaptitude. It was a

lapse into the old ways, long chilled and disused, the ways of Mary Chegwidden's rustic youth, when the pretty, good-humoured, smiling Cornish girl had known how to say pleasant, if uncultured, things, and had been hearty and friendly with her fellows. Life, with its perplexities, confusions, blunders, disasters, had long overlaid this old self of hers; but as the fog of gathering bewilderment settled more steadily over the failing mind, there were occasional gleams like these of a return to the long-forgotten self. Mary Trevenna was gone, and Molly Chegwidden lived again for moments. It was a self revived that her daughter had never known; the clue to it was wanting. She could not disassociate her mother from the disturbance of her later life.

Viola spoke very sweetly to the poor woman in reply, promising to come; and Mrs. Trevenna smiled at her vaguely, pleased by the soft caressing voice and pretty exotic face.

"I wish you would drive back with *me* now, Miss Trevenna," Viola said, holding Penrose's hand, and pleading with her deep blue eyes. "Come and be introduced to my mother. It is not late, and we are only twenty minutes' drive from you. Please do!"

"Ay, Pen, go with the young lady," Mrs. Trevenna put in, with unwonted promptitude, still in the friendly, uncultured manner into which she had lapsed. "You've none so many friends, my dear. A girl or two about would liven you up."

And Penrose yielded to both persuasions and went.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. FIELD was greatly surprised by seeing Viola return with a stranger, with whom she seemed on the most intimate terms; but the good-natured, complacent woman could never be otherwise than hearty and kind. She was not, however, in her usual state of self-satisfied contentment with all her surroundings. There were little anxious lines in her face, a certain watchful discomfort in her eyes, which followed her darling about with perpetual solicitude. Viola had not been "herself," as Mrs. Field expressed it, since her engagement with "Tom Lees" had been announced.

She had kept him at arms' length for a long while, wavering between acceptance and denial, and when she had given way it had been with a passionate petulance unlike her usual nature, which seemed due more to weariness than conviction. When Viola was out of her sight, or flattered and coaxed into better spirits, her mother was able to feel satisfaction in dwelling on the solid comforts of the position; on Mr. Lees' great wealth and munificence, his fondness for Viola, and lavish expenditure upon her; on the pleasures of ordering a magnificent trousseau, which should excite the envy of all her friends, and in planning a wedding which should fill many paragraphs in the ladies' papers. Her fancy even soared farther, and pictured a luxurious nursery and a little adorable grandchild endowed with Viola's face and its father's fortune. She was just the woman to whom these solid and matter-of-fact delights are in-

estimable; but within the robust, worldly, luxurious British matron there existed one deeper, higher, and intenser feeling than the ordinary one, the motherhood that knew how to tremble and adore. Viola must be happy, or every pleasure was mere dust and ashes, and nothing else greatly mattered. Of course she *would* be happy, so she argued incessantly with herself, when she was fairly used to her prospects and realized how bright they were. Just now she was not very well, and that always made her a little depressed.

When she understood who Penrose was, *that* Miss Trevenna, about whose mother there were discreditable stories, who had unfairly deposed Geoffrey—Mrs. Field never spoke of him to any one now, but in her heart there lurked some faint affection for him, whom she called to herself "poor dear Geoff"—and who was to succeed "that wretched mother" as

mistress of Redwood, which Viola ought to have been, she was a little inclined to stiffen, and Viola's evident friendliness surprised her. However, she was too good-humoured to keep up any pique, especially with one so unsophisticated and sincere, one who looked at Viola with such kindness in her eyes.

"We are thinking of another change soon, for Vi's sake," Mrs. Field said, in the course of conversation; "she really is not strong enough for the wear and tear of a London season. I think I must take her to Brighton or Eastbourne, or somewhere, before—before the marriage, and try and make her look a bit more robust."

"She does not look well," Penrose said gravely, a little too gravely and truthfully to please the mother who loved to cheat her own anxiety, and to make other people say flattering things which in her heart she could not believe.

"Oh, there's nothing much the matter, after all," she said hastily, with a little artificial laugh, "Vi is a bit of an impostor. Mr. Field says she has made capital all her life by her delicate looks to get her own way."

"That is nonsense!" Viola said, with a flash of sudden anger, unusual to her. "I *never* get my own way, and you ought to know it. I am not going to be shipped off out of London to please them," she added bitterly, turning to Penrose; "I hate Brighton — change of air is my mother's one recipe for everything and everybody. I like London best, one has less time for one's self here."

Something bewildered and a little piteous in the mother's eyes, which turned from Viola to her, touched Penrose. The pathos of life was not to be escaped even in this great, splendid room, silk-lined, rose-scented, filled with costly *bric-à-brac*, and every modern contrivance for spend-

ing money. Fat, comfortable, smiling Mrs. Field in her Paris costume, with great diamonds twinkling on her white indolent hands, was, after all, the mother of one only beloved daughter whose fragile existence might vanish any moment into darkness, like a spark shot from a fire. That nameless terror of a vague foreboding quivered over her handsome face for a moment, and made Penrose sorry for her. She did not, however, show any of it in her rather thick, common, comfortable way of speaking.

"Come now, Vi, you know you're talking nonsense! You young ones nowadays keep your parents in fine subjection! Here's tea—it's late enough, but I thought you'd want some, dear, you're such a girl for tea! It's that I believe which does you harm—upsets your nerves—but you *will* have it. As for you, Miss Trevenna, you look as if you didn't know what *nerves* meant. That reminds me. You told me

didn't you, that it was Miss Trevenna stopped your ponies that time they bolted, and I never had the chance before of thanking her; I'm glad to have it now, I'm sure."

"It was nothing—I did not hurt myself—any one could have done it," Penrose said simply.

Mrs. Field gave her little artificial laugh again. "Any one! Come now, I can't swallow that quite. It isn't every young lady, say what you will, that could stop a couple of frightened ponies in a crowded street. You really must allow us to consider you a bit of a heroine for it."

"Any one could see that Penrose was not like any other 'young ladies,' as you call them," Viola said, leaning back languidly, and sipping her cup of tea as if it were almost too much trouble. "You must judge *her* by quite different rules from the rest of us, poor useless fools that we are."

Penrose had very soon to leave. Viola took both her hands, and suddenly kissed her for good-bye; as she did so she whispered—

"I'll think it all over to-night—but don't blame me if I do nothing—don't think of me as if I had any courage, any determination—I haven't; it's easier to drift."

Mrs. Field, surprised and somehow dissatisfied with her daughter's curious effusion of manner, on her side was polite but not expansive. She asked Penrose to come and see Viola; but the invitation was evidently a little forced, and given only because Viola wished it.

"What has made you take up in this way with that girl, Vi?" she asked, a little crossly, as she turned back into the room after Penrose was gone. "What is there so wonderful about her?"

"I want her for a friend," Viola said quietly; "she's not like anybody else."

"No, that she isn't. She's not got a bit of manner."

"Society rubbish you mean, I suppose."

"Well, if you like to call it so. Everything's wrong that I say. I know I wish there were no such a person. But don't flare up child, I'm not saying anything against Miss Trevenna herself. It isn't *her* fault that her mother was—is such a character."

Viola half smiled; but it was rather a bitter little smile.

"That poor forlorn woman! Her character may *have been* anything—I don't know—but no one could feel anything but pity for such a wreck now. She doesn't look as if she could ever have had enough in her to be bad. I suppose she was weak — and tempted — there's nothing strange or new in that."

"Goodness, Vi! How do you know Mrs. Trevenna? Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes. This afternoon. I drove Penrose home to their lodgings, and went in. Do you think I'm infected? I can't catch imbecility or weakness—I am afflicted with those already."

"Viola! I don't know you to-day; you're not like yourself."

"Very likely not," Viola returned, in the same low bitter tone, staring coldly at her mother. "I'm not like myself, if I was happy before, as I believe I was. I am miserable—that's all, mummy; there's nothing surprising or alarming in the fact. I suppose I never had my proper share of misery before."

"*Miserable*, Viola? When we all care for nothing but you and your happiness; when you've been my one thought all your life—my one care." Mrs. Field sank into the depths of a chair and began to sob, tears slowly gathered as the sound of her own grief half frightened her.

Viola got up slowly and went heavily

to the door. "You needn't cry about it," she said coldly, in a dull and lifeless voice; "it's perhaps nobody's fault. It isn't even mine that I am what I am. They say you make children delicate by coddling them—I dare say it is the same mental treatment which has made me weak-minded. I have been just coddled into the thing I am."

She left her mother sobbing, without an attempt at comforting or caressing her. Certainly this was a new development of the exotic which her mother could neither understand nor reckon with! Her husband surprised her thus in tears. He stood in astonished contemplation of the strange phenomenon of the prosperous, well-dressed woman, with all the surroundings of wealth and ease, abandoning herself, in the unshamed bourgeoise fashion natural to her uncultured nature, to a flood of tears and storm of sobs.

"Good gracious, mother!" he said,

pausing in front of her, with his hands in his pockets, and staring with an air of vacant consternation, "what the deuce is the row with you, old lady? Cook given warning?"

"Cook!"—indignantly, with choking voice. "No. As if I troubled about *cooks*."

"Well, *I* do, if you don't. Cooks have a precious lot to do with the comfort of one's life, I know. But what's up? Vi isn't ill? She went out all right this morning didn't she—with Tom?"

"No; she isn't ill—at least I don't know—she may be hysterical or something. I hope she is, for she's been making me m-m-miserable with her talk." She had wiped away her tears, but still sobbed a little.

"Making you miserable? Why the dickens—what ails you both? I never knew anything like women for fancying and bothering! You may give 'em

anything or everything; they're never content!"

"Oh, James," the mother said piteously, taking him by the sleeve, "my mind misgives me a bit about this marriage! I don't feel as if Vi were—were happy over it. Don't be angry," she added hastily, as she saw his face lower, and heard him utter an oath. "You know we *did* urge her overmuch to it—you were so set on the match."

"Damn it all! You put everything on to me. Set on it! Of course I was. Anybody would want his daughter to marry a rich good fellow that doted on her, I should think! But it's the same tale it always was. From a baby you spoilt and cockered up that girl till she didn't know what she wanted, and if she had every other mortal thing would whine for the moon. You persuaded me, against my will, to let her be engaged to a good-for-nothing, *dilettante* chap, and when that

was impossible, you let her go on hankering after him. She kept poor old Tom dangling after her like a boy does a mouse on a string; now she'd give a pull one way, then let go. Pah—I'm sick of her nonsense and foolery! Here's everything settled and ordered. She's to have whatever money can buy—travel when she likes, a house in town, a place in the country if she's a mind, a trousseau and settlement fit for a princess,—and she takes to fretting out of sheer wantonness! And you aid and abet her! I've no patience with the pair of you. But I won't have any more of it—I tell you flat; the thing's as good as done. The sooner she's married the better. Once over, she'll be pleased enough; it's only that she don't know what she wants."

Mrs. Field drew a long, shivering sigh. There was something cold and heavy at her heart, some dull misgiving that haunted her when she had leisure to think. But

after all, she tried to believe, as she had done all her life, in the comfortable creed that "things would come right."

Mr. Lees *was* very rich and lavish, very much in love with Viola. Viola was easy-tempered on the whole, if spoilt; she would no doubt grow fond of a generous husband. Why, she herself had not been in the least bit in love with James Field when she married him—there had been *some one else* in the far away days of her girlhood; and hadn't she made him a good wife and been happy? She was used to him, fond of him—in a way. He hadn't the best of tempers, and wouldn't lose the nasty habit of swearing when he was put out; but, on the whole, he was a kind husband, and let her have what she wanted.

It would be so with Viola—when she had settled down to the busy whirl of a gay married life; or, better still, if a baby came to charm her discontent away, Geoffrey Trevenna's memory would fade

out of her mind, and she would be a contented, admired society lady, like the rest.

But the foreboding uneasiness lurking at her heart led her to go softly into her daughter's room before dinner to see how she was. They were expecting a few friends, and Mrs. Field was handsomely dressed in thick heavy brocade, and Viola's pretty pale blue satin was being slipped over her curly head. She was pale, and there was a look in her eyes that pained her mother. Yes, her arms looked very thin, and those bones in her white neck ought not to be so obvious; still she smiled and spoke much as usual. She had been a little hysterical—she often was.

Mrs. Field thought that she would consult the doctor about some more tonic and malt extract for her. But girls were often upset and queer at such a time as this, on the eve of marriage. She went

downstairs, after saying an affectionate word or two to her child, to receive her guests with her usual bland effusiveness. The only thing that showed any trace of her fit of despondency was that she was a little bit cross and snubbing to Mr. Lees, and that she encouraged Viola in avoiding any possible *tête-a-têtes* with him throughout the evening. Mr. Lees sulked, but Viola seemed rather more lively than usual, and a bright pink spot of colour on each cheekbone came to relieve the pallor which had been noticeable before, and made her blue eyes shine. She looked thin and delicate, but no less pretty than ever, as her mother fondly observed. She did not observe, however, that the girl only took a morsel or two on her plate, and hardly ate anything. There were too many flowers and ornaments about for such trifles to be obvious, and Viola had always been the smallest eater in the world.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was not often in the domestic affairs of his household that the tyrant asserted itself in Mr. Field, but it was there, and when—as now—strongly provoked, he was apt, as he expressed it, to "put his foot down." He might aptly be compared at such times to an infuriated bull, who, putting its great angry head low, charges passionately, and without discrimination at every object immediately before it. He had set his heart, or rather his will, on marrying his daughter to his chum, Tom Lees. He not only desired it for the sake of what it brought, he was

almost *compelled* to urge it by every means in his power, from a strong, though secret obligation which he was under to Viola's suitor. In consequence Mr. Field "put his foot down." He swore, by all the gods he worshipped, that there should be no more "damned nonsense and shilly-shallying"; that Viola should be made to know her own mind, and what was best for her, and that the wedding should be irrevocably fixed for the first week in July. He was a perfect whirlwind in the house, and the lives of his wife and daughter were rendered intolerable to them, till half threatened and coerced by sheer terror, half wearied and coaxed by persuasion, Viola gave an exhausted kind of half consent, which her father fastened on as a dog on a bone. The whirl and vortex of business that followed, the incessant demands on her time and interest by dressmakers, milliners, jewellers, shoals of presents half stupefied the girl. She

looked and acted as in a vague dream. The one thing she shrank from and avoided successfully, was the solitary presence of her future husband — her mother trembling in her heart for her darling, but drugging herself with fond hopes and vain expectations, humoured her in everything else, since the one thing was conceded. Yet, whenever she had time to study Viola, she was shaken by a fear and foreboding which no expedient, no distraction could entirely drive out. Viola did not look or behave like herself. There was something wild, strange, and terrifying in her face, she seemed like a person either dreaming or hypnotized. She said and did in society what people seemed to expect of her in a mechanical sort of way; but when by chance she was alone with her mother the effort ceased, and she sank into a dull brooding despair which all these comfortable theories would not explain. She had no one to whom

she dared express her fears. Her husband went into a passion, which was an easy way of avoiding argument, swore freely, and declared it was just how girls were before marriage, especially spoilt children like Vi. Mr. Lees did not say anything, but he seemed sullen and uneasy. It was rather hard, certainly, on the bridegroom, so soon to be, to be shunned by his bride, and to have nothing but the most ordinary intercourse with her. Perhaps he felt he was paying dear for his whistle, but it seemed too late to say anything, and in his coarse animal way he had been in love with Viola for some considerable time. Too late! These were the words that moaned for ever in Viola's ears; yet, before they were actually true, some power, not herself it seemed, drove her into unpremeditated and active revolt against the fate that overshadowed her. She was in a curious state of mind and body, close to that mysterious borderland where sanity

and insanity meet in strange association. Her frail, overstrained, excited body, with the sensitive, frightened, weak, passionate soul within, was hurried into actions that her saner, calmer moments, would not have dared even to plan. The last goad which stung her to them was an unexpected *tête-à-tête* with the man to whom she had madly consented to give her life. She had let herself be forced into this engagement, yet when she came suddenly upon him alone in the dusky drawing-room, and he caught hold of her and kissed her hotly all over her face and throat, half in passion, half in rage at her persistent shrinking and avoidance of him, her whole soul and body rose suddenly in a fury of resistance and abhorrence, which for the time turned timidity into frantic action, and shyness into the sickening hatred of both mental and physical revolt. With a sudden fierce strength, born of the fever of her mind, and the loathing which

thrilled through every fibre, she repelled the hot, panting, passionate grasp of the big, angry man, who had seized her as a master might take hold of a slave, and had pressed his hot, horrible kisses on her, and pushed him from her with a shrill cry of intense hatred.

"Let me go—let me go; you are horrible—I cannot bear you—I will never bear you."

He broke out into a loud, insulting laugh of rage.

"I like that! Not let me even kiss you, when you've promised to marry me in a week!"

"Wait—wait," she panted out; "I am not your wife yet—wait and see," and she was gone in a moment. She sped upstairs, regardless how the unusual haste and movement, and the passion of excitement which shook every nerve in her body, made her heart beat and flutter in her breast.

She shut the door of her room violently, with a sound that echoed all over the house, and fell on to a chair sobbing wild, loud, hysterical, screaming sobs that seemed to tear her delicate throat and chest. Then the very desperation and intensity of her possession forced her into a kind of false calm. She was strung up to action, and no one now should stop or turn her. If she gave way to this weakness some one would come; the old influences alike of love and anger would overpower her; she might be frightened out of her resolution to which she had suddenly been driven by an anguish of revolt almost as irresponsible as madness.

The feverishness of the mood made her strong and ready, as people are sometimes under delirium. She stripped off her evening dress, and put on a morning one, with unready but hurried fingers, threw on a long travelling cloak, and pinned her hat to the curly rolls of her pretty hair. She

hastily drew her blotting-book towards her when she was ready, and scribbled two short incoherent pencil notes; the first was to her mother; it only said—

"Don't be frightened, mummy. I am all right, only I cannot, cannot stay and marry him. It would kill me. I am not brave enough to stay and face it out. I am afraid of papa. But don't worry about me. I am really all right."

The next she folded and directed to Mr. Lees. It contained what follows:—

"I cannot bear the thought of marrying you. I was a fool, and worse than a fool, to promise anything. You know I told you I never did and never should love you; but I did not know how much I should loathe the idea. You cannot think worse of me than I do of myself for letting it go so far. I do ask you to forgive me that, but I can't for leaving you.

"V. F."

Then she opened her door cautiously, holding her breath to listen whether it were safe to venture. There was not a sound. Her mother was in her dressing-

room, getting ready for dinner. The servants were either downstairs or in the dining-room; but if she met them they should not, they could not keep her. No one but her father could do that, and he was not in the house, and not expected till late. Mr. Lees, if he had not left in a rage, was in the drawing-room. She crept downstairs like a shadow, repressing the loud, gasping, sobbing breath which struggled within her with a stupendous effort. She was safely in the hall without having encountered any one. She paused a moment here. She had a purpose. There was a big brass bowl full of visiting cards. She chose out one, and, holding it tight in her hot quivering little hand, softly opened the big double front door, slid through and shut it behind her. It so happened that a cab had just delivered some young man a door or two off, and Viola unhesitatingly hailed it. She gave him the card she held. "Drive there,

please," she said firmly enough, and the cab in a moment whirled her away. She gave a little strange exultant cry, half laugh, half gasp, "Safe! and it shall never be now!"

CHAPTER VII.

GEOFFREY had, for a wonder, really done a hard day's work. He was beginning to get a few cases now, chiefly owing to Mr. Hamley's exertions in his favour, and was occasionally spoken of as a young man of some promise. For what is reckoned at the Bar such extreme youth, this was high praise. He had been in court till afternoon, and since then had been busy over some papers which he pushed away at last, as it grew dusk, and leaning back in his elbow chair, indulged himself with rest, meditation, and a pipe. He had heard casually from a friend in court that Viola Field's wedding was really

fixed to come off in a week; that it was to be a very swell affair, of course; and that she seemed able, like the rest of her sex, to put up with a beastly cad like old Lees for the sake of his pot of money. This news had lurked somewhere in a corner of his mind all day under the current of his occupations, and now it came naturally to the surface when he had leisure to think it out. He was, of course, he told himself, awfully sorry.

For some time he failed to realize that the sorrow was mainly, if not entirely, for *Viola*, not for himself. Perhaps he was very fickle, certainly it would be worse than foolish now to regret his loss of her; perhaps he got over all his emotions when he first heard of the engagement.

"Poor little Vi! I believe she can't be happy"—it was the Locksley Hall sentiment—"having loved *me*, to decline, on a lower range of feelings," etc.

Tom Lees was a coarse sort of animal,

big, fat, red-haired. It was rather like Caliban and Ariel, Bottom and Titania. Viola had always been such a coy, soft, dainty, sensitive little thing. It was disgusting to think how she could have brought all these delicate traits of hers under such a yoke; that she, like the rest, had sold her prettiness, her refinement, her fastidious girlish maidenliness for so many thousands a year, and all the et-ceteras of wealth.

But, though he would have given much to save her from such a fall, and to set her free from so vile a bondage, his regret was not—he was frank enough to own it was not—chiefly or painfully personal. Viola, after all, though he had been desperately in love with her, though she had had the strongest charm for him, was not the ideal companion of a man's better self. She was a darling child, a pet, sweet to caress, intoxicating even in the magical glamour of sweet twilight hours,

full of love. Her soft loveliness and the pathetic grace which touched and almost pained a man's heart when she was his own to protect and care for, had been irresistible to him. He never should, or could, forget the sensations, the delights of their first days of Paradise; but they were all over, utterly, irrevocably over, and he was not even sure that he would live them again.

Life was altogether different now, and he tried to find out in what the difference consisted, and what had happened to change him as well as it. He had done with the old butterfly existence for ever; something a little stern, but engrossingly interesting had taken hold of him. He had done growing, and was a man, a man of action and decision, a man who meant to *do* something and *be* something. And under these circumstances one wants a companion. It is dull work slaving and striving without sympathy. Yes, and

understanding sympathy too, sympathy that is on the same level, a heart that can embrace and a mind that can stimulate. There's only women who are like that, and not all women! A vision of a wife, strong and brave, yet tender, a true comrade and a true lover rose before him. He and she together might make a good thing of life. It was not the rosy dream of ecstasy which first love brings when one takes the sparkling cup of passion to one's lips, and drinks a pledge to hope. There was nothing intoxicating about this dream; it was serene, and large with promise, and it left no ache behind.

His thoughts slipped on, but I cannot give the exact means of transit, to Penrose. He had seen much of her lately. Mrs. Trevenna had had a relapse, a kind of seizure, which had led to his being a great deal at their lodgings. Penrose was no helpless weakling, as we know. Any emergency, any call to more entire service

always found an answer in prompt courage and devotion. She was capable of standing alone to breast a sea of troubles, but when aid and sympathy might be had she gladly welcomed them.

Geoffrey's cousinly assumption of the right to stand by her and help her was accepted with an ardent gratitude and generous return of affection that was something new and dear to him. He had never known her so intimately, or cared for her so much as one night lately, when he had insisted on staying at their lodgings, that Jane and Penrose might have him at hand if Mrs. Trevenna died, as they almost believed she would. He had been glad enough to sit up all night with the solace of a book and a pipe, just for the sake of seeing Penrose now and then when she came downstairs to report herself and to exchange a few words with him. Then when the long night was over, and Mrs. Trevenna had rallied her strength so that

all immediate danger was at an end, he had enjoyed the impromptu early breakfast which Jane made ready for them while the invalid slept, and which he shared with a pale, heavy-eyed, but happy Penrose, who, in her *déshabille* and ruffled hair, looked somehow sweeter, softer, more attractive than he had ever seen her. Perhaps it was *then*, at that curious unconventional meal that the thought had just darted through him that the man who had that frank, kind, brave face opposite him every morning might be happy enough, content to give up other dreams and fancies for such a sober, sweet reality. At any rate, he was sure that he felt so now, and that there were not many women in the world like Penrose.

"But a fellow would have to deserve it," he thought, as he got up slowly from his paper-littered table and began to set things in order after one long, lazy stretch, "and that wouldn't be so easy. Britomart

ought to have a perfect Galahad for her knight, and we don't get Galahads in London nowadays!"

His mind glanced swiftly back in thought over his past; it was not perhaps a specially sinful one, but it was not what would look beautiful in any pure, clear eyes. He had not been worse than his fellows, perhaps a little better. According to the world's code he had been honourable towards men and tolerably good towards women. He had followed no high ideals, and had simply pursued what pleased and attracted him. It was thanks chiefly to his rather fastidious taste and a cultivated refinement of habit that those things which pleased and attracted him had not been low and vile, but they had never been specially fine or lofty. It was a poor sort of record, and he shook his head a little at some reflection which rose from its review. But he was not thirty yet. If he had some distinct aim and motive

he might make something better of things yet. He sat down again without attempting to light his lamp, and mused over past, present, and to come.

A knock at his door roused him to call mechanically "Come in." He expected to see his landlady, with preparations for dinner, and hardly turned his head as the door was timidly and softly opened, till the silence that followed struck him, and the difference in the movements of whoever had entered, from Mrs. Gibbs. Yet it was not entire silence, he was conscious of a quick panting breath, like a frightened animal, and he turned suddenly round to peer through the dusk at the intruder. For a moment or two all he saw was that it was a woman's figure, but certainly *not* the portly dimensions of Mrs. Gibbs.

"Who is it?" he asked, rather sharply. Then, in another tone, but hesitatingly, "Not Penrose?"

The girl made a fluttering, hurried sort

of rush towards him. He saw in a moment that this was not, could not be Penrose. The movement, the whole air of the figure was utterly unlike hers, yet strangely familiar to him. *Who was it?* Not—yes—he uttered the one word, "Viola!" in a tone of utter amazement. Was it a dream, an apparition? Was this really a flesh and blood Viola, or only her wraith, come to show him she was dead? This doubt did not last a second, for Viola's burning little hands had fastened on his, and she was sobbing, gasping out passionate and incoherent words.

"Viola! Good God, what has brought you here to me? What can you want of *me* now, Viola?"

"Don't—don't," she panted—"don't reproach me! I know it all, Geoff—I've found it out. I was a fool, an idiot—you did not really want to part with me, and I ought not to have let you go, Geoff dear. Geoff darling, it half killed me—I

could not, could not bear it, after all—when it came near—that horrible marriage—all the sickening reality of what I had brought on myself—I couldn't, I couldn't! Take me back, Geoff. I never loved anybody but you, my own darling; but, till now, I did not know how much. I should have died if I had stopped and gone through with that—indeed I should. I am ill—it has half killed me; but I thought, I felt if I could only get away, and be with *you* again, I—I——"

She bent her face over his hands, which hers still clutched at with that strenuous, yet feeble hold which was significant of the feverish abandonment of her whole being. Her soft burning lips just touched them, and he felt the tears on her cheeks, which had not yet fallen. She was half kneeling before him—he felt stupid and dazed with the shock of her strange appearance, but the consciousness of this attitude of hers was horribly painful. He rose

from his chair, lifting her gently to her feet, and put her, with quiet tenderness, on to the cushioned lounge by the fireplace. Then he crossed to the door and locked it —the clock struck, and he was thankful to find there was still half an hour before Mrs. Gibbs was likely to disturb him. He did not light the lamp, the darkness seemed better—he was almost afraid of seeing Viola clearly, and the light in the street with the twilight of the room was enough.

He did not know how to speak to her, what to say, what to do. He was utterly confused and bewildered. This was not the Viola of his past, the Viola he thought he knew by heart, the half-coy, half-yielding tender little darling, who had been reared on rose leaves, who had been terrified by every emergency, unready to act on her own responsibility, clinging, but not passionate, nervous and afraid of anything strong, tragic, or unwonted. He

was a perfect stranger to the hysterical, passionate girl who had suddenly thrown off the restraints and habits of her sheltered life, had broken the silken bonds which had always held her, and come to him in this desperate strait which her own folly had created. Every other feeling, however, was soon lost in him, under a rush of the strongest pity. The fragile, quivering, panting young creature who cried out to him for what—alas! he knew it—he had no longer to give her, was infinitely pathetic to him just because he realized, with perfect distinctness, how different his feelings would have been if she had come to him like this before—it sounded brutal, but his heart would say it—before he left off loving her, or rather of being in love with her. Poor, pretty lost child! His soul yearned over her with a compassion and tenderness which was the very purest and highest feeling he had ever known. The one thing to be

done was first to comfort her, next to save her from any taint of evil or reproach consequent on the madness to which despair had goaded her. It must have been a deep despair which could have urged the shy timid girl he used to know into such an action! Confused, troubled, dazed as he was, he tried to bring every nerve into her service, and not to fail her in this moment of need. He came and sat beside her, took her hand, where he felt the pulses leap and bound, with one of his, and stroked it gently with the other.

"Tell me, dear," he said, in the softest whisper of kindness—"tell me what has happened, as soon as you can, and what I can do for you. What made you leave home, Viola?"

"He *kissed* me," she whispered back through her teeth, which seemed to chatter. "He was horrible—I could not bear it! Then it came over me that I was not, as I had seemed to be, in a dream—

that things were real, that I had promised to marry him, and *in a week*—what it meant." She stopped, and shuddered all over. Then she raised her voice and hurried on, as if determined to express in one minute all the feelings that had been hidden out of sight.

"I think I was in a dream—not myself—it went on and on. I said things and did things in a kind of unconscious way, as if I were a doll worked by machinery. Father was horribly angry and determined about it. Mother went on coaxing, persuading, muffling everything up in soft words that meant nothing. There was so much to do, so many people coming and going, it was all a whirl and confusion; I had no time to think. At nights, when I was alone, sometimes it all came over me; but generally I was too tired, I could not help sleeping. I felt so ill, so weak, so tired always, nothing seemed to matter. But to-day it was as if suddenly I woke

up, the fog cleared off, and I saw what I had been doing, what a vileness, what an insanity it was! I knew how I hated and loathed him—that to marry him was worse than death—and you know how hideous *that* always seemed to me, Geoff. Worse than death? Yes, if I had not thought of you, and made up my mind to come to you, I believe I might have dared to kill myself. It seemed far less horrible to be dead and out of his reach, than to go through that marriage that was *fixed*, actually fixed for next week! It all rushed upon me in a moment; how I loathed him and loved you all the time; how I must get free of him and go back to you. Oh, Geoff, Geoff, Geoff! You'll keep me—you'll keep me safe, and love me—love me, darling! I've been wicked, vilely weak; but I am sorry, and I've come back!"

She turned suddenly to him, and held wide her arms for him to embrace her, her

voice had risen to a wild cry, that sounded through the room. He took her to his breast, and pressed his hand on her soft curly head that felt so strangely familiar to it. What could he do? He could not but accept the trust which the old love would have made a passionate joy to him. Alas! the passion and the joy were dead within him—he knew it; but a deep and pitying tenderness was born to fill their places, which rose like a quiet star after the glory and pomp of the day were all over.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE Geoffrey pressed the fragile, quivering little frame to him, he was conscious, vaguely yet certainly, of the extraordinary state of excitement, bordering on delirium, in which Viola was. Her heart frightened him by its loud, irregular beating; it seemed to tear at her side, and to shake her all over like a tempest. Men are not apt to be very sensible and cool-headed in a crisis, unless they are specially educated and trained by the professions which demand calmness and resource; but he was so strongly alive to the absolute need of soothing and supporting her, that he was forced to employ all the common

sense and judgment of which he was capable. It was no easy position in which he found himself. Viola had thrown over all the ordinary restraints and conventions of her position and training, and was entirely in his power—her name, her happiness, her very life all seemed to hang upon his immediate action. He dreaded what might follow, what might be said of him and of her, as he would not have dreaded anything so external had he been, as he once was, passionately in love with her. Passion now had nothing to say to the situation—the cool, pitying tenderness which he felt had none of the same elements in it. To get her somewhere safely, out of reach of any venomous tongues, under some strong and gentle care, this was the first thing to be done. Perhaps, after that, events would declare themselves, and take responsibility from him.

"Dear Viola—dearest," he said, hesi-

tating, and choosing the fond words which he hoped would reach her, "have you thought where you are to stay? Forgive me, darling, don't take it wrong if I remind you that these bachelor rooms of mine are not—will not—I could not make you comfortable here. And your mother, Viola? Does she know where you are? She will be very miserable about you, won't she?"

"No. I don't know—I can't care. I told her I should be all right. Geoffrey"—she spoke now vehemently, almost fiercely, raising her head from his breast and a little pushing him from her—"you'll not be cruel enough to want me to go back, to be tortured—to be sacrificed?"

Her look, something about her, frightened him, the darkly flushed face, the dilated fatally brilliant eyes, a sort of purple stain about her lips and eyelids, and that terrible beat and flutter at her side, against which she suddenly put her hand.

"No, no, dear!" he said hastily, but as

calmly as he could. "I will do anything I can for you." Then a sudden inspiration came upon him, and he said, with a clearing look of relief, "Let me take you to Mrs. Trevenna's lodgings—to Penrose. Penrose will help you. You like Penrose, Vi?"

The very repetition of the name seemed a help and strength to him, the vision of her overflowing and tender sympathy was a consolation. Viola's eyes, too, softened, and a faint dawn of a more natural expression came into her face, as if some strain relaxed a little.

"If you like," she said wearily. "Anywhere but home. Oh yes; if I cannot stay with *you*. Penrose will understand, and she can't be angry with me, for she begged me not to—not to do what I had nearly done. Geoff dear, *you* are not angry with me either? Say you're not."

The fierce, feverish energy was gone, the old pathetic, wistful, appealing look

that he associated with Viola in her sometimes saddened moods, when every mood of hers had been a care and a study to him, had returned to the worn, delicate face—changed, older; sadly changed even now, but not so terribly altered as that other look of hers had made it. He drew a long breath of deep relief. At any rate, for the moment here was a way out of the worst. Once safe under Penrose's care, sheltered by the mere name of Mrs. Trevenna, Viola had some answer to make to the most bitter reproaches that could reach her. No one need know that she had come to his chambers in the dusk, and had thrown herself on his chivalry in the wild abandonment which had startled and confounded him, breaking down all his ideas of her in one terrifying moment. The very weakness of her character seemed to have given her a strange fictitious strength of action. She had drifted to him as if her soul had been blown by

some fiery wind of the Furies; against all the traditions of her life, against those unwritten laws to which women of the world are bound to bow, and, more than that, against what had seemed to be all the instincts and characteristics of her own timid, helpless, wavering nature. He could only account for the act by a sort of conviction that she was not *herself* at all for the time; that a kind of delirium possessed her into which the stress of her sudden abhorrence of her near future had driven her. The loathing she felt for her new lover, brought to an acute climax, had evolved the return of the old love, which had only been stifled but never lost in her. The repulsion from one had been the attraction to the other. She had acted almost insensibly under the intense influence of those two forces. Geoffrey was thinking hard how best to manage so as to entirely shield her from even the unimportant gossip of so insignificant a

person as Mrs. Gibbs. He got up from his seat beside her with a kind pressure of both her hands, and began to move about his rooms, putting his papers together and taking his hat from its peg. Then he unlocked the door and rang his bell. When he heard the heavy step lumbering up the stairs he went out to meet the woman.

"I've a client here on business, Mrs. Gibbs," he explained, in a very clear and commonplace tone, "and I shall not be able to dine at home as I meant, for I must go out directly. Kindly open the front door and whistle up a hansom. We will come down when it is there."

Mrs. Gibbs turned, grumbling *sotto voce* at her trouble wasted over a very late dinner, and the thoughtlessness of gentlemen in general, and Mr. Trevenna in particular; and Geoffrey came back to Viola.

"Now, dear," he said, in a loud, cheerful, elaborately cheerful voice, "if you will

put yourself straight—you are dreadfully tired and overdone, I'm sure—you'll want rest; and then—to-morrow—we shall have plenty of time to talk, to settle——"

He stooped over to help her to her feet. She seemed to need help, support even. He almost lifted her up, and she staggered a little though he kept his arm round her. She looked up piteously in his face.

"Geoff, while we are alone like this—one word, one promise—you'll be true to me now, though I had not the courage to be true to you; you'll not forsake me, Geoffrey? Darling, I am afraid—life has turned into something terrible—I hardly know what has happened—what will happen—but I know *this*. If you leave me to stand alone, if you are not good to me, I shall die—I shall die!"

She clasped her hands round his arm, her head dropped over them, her body swayed towards him. He held her softly but strongly; his whole heart was stirred

and thrilled to its depths with a feeling to which he could give no name. He tried to think it was love.

"My own Viola," he said, in a deep, low, solemn voice—a tone which his voice had never taken once before in the whole course of his life—"my own Viola, my poor, sweet little girl, I'll not fail you. If I am not true to this trust of yours, if I ever forsake or hurt you, may God for ever shut His mercy from me. I am yours. Trust me—ask what you will of me—I am yours indeed!"

His words, the very weight and impressiveness of his tone, and the pale, firm steadfastness of his face as she searched it for confirmation, seemed to give her calmness and power. She steadied herself, and some shadow of her old, sweet, piquant, yet half-plaintive smile, came back. She put up her lips to meet his.

"My love," she said, "I *will* trust you. I will not give you any more trouble. I

am quite strong, quite happy now. Let us go, if you want to take me. Penrose will understand. I can trust *her* too, I know."

They heard the cab draw up with a jerk, and Geoffrey took her downstairs. She faltered a little as if she felt her physical weakness now that her mind was released a little from the strain of its fever and tension, and clung close to his arm, giving her whole weight to him—her weight which was, after all, so painfully little that he hardly felt it. He could have carried her altogether on one arm as if she had been a little child. It hurt him to realize in this way how wasted she was. All her curves seemed to have sunk away, her slenderness had become emaciation. But Viola was made of such delicate, frail porcelain it did not need more than a touch to injure her. It was, he had no doubt, the uncertainty and unhappiness she had gone through that had worn her

thus. If she were at rest, comforted and caressed into happiness, the soft rose-bloom would come again, the tender outlines would grow rounded, smiles would light up the eyes and make them lose that terribly pathetic foreboding, which he could not see without heartache.

Cruel common sense might argue that Viola had chosen her own fate, and had brought this upon herself; but he would not allow such a conclusion. He was much more ready to blame every one else, her father and mother, the gross persistence of her suitor, his own action in first giving her up. It seemed too brutal to blame any one so unfit to do battle with the forces of life. He was ready now to champion her before all the world.

The drive took about twenty minutes. Viola did not say a word. She seemed too utterly exhausted for any sort of mental or bodily exertion. She leant against him, and her hand kept a clasp of

his, but was quite passive. Her long eyelashes had fallen over her tired eyes. He could faintly see the heavy violet lids and her pale, peaceful, otherwise almost expressionless face. He was not even sure that she was awake. Only when the cab stopped her eyes opened instantly, and she gave him a faint little smile.

"You are very tired, darling?"

"Very. I have not slept—oh, I can't say for how long! But I shall sleep sound to-night. I am too tired to be able to think or to fret any more."

This time he actually lifted her out and carried her up the steps.

"Miss Trevenna is in the sitting-room?"

"No, sir," said the staring maid, gaping at Viola in mute amaze. "She is in her ma's room. Shall I call her?"

"No—yes, please; that is, just tell Miss Trevenna that I am here, and would be glad to speak to her a moment. But you need not say anything about the

lady. She is rather faint. Miss Trevenna knows her. She will have to sleep here to-night. I will go into the dining-room, and wait for Miss Trevenna."

Jane was lying down, and Penrose was sitting, doing nothing, in the dimly lighted bedchamber by her mother. Mrs. Trevenna seemed to be asleep, but it was difficult now to tell when she really slept, and when it was a kind of unconsciousness. She had grown much worse the last week, after a kind of seizure which at the time had seemed slight. The doctor no longer talked of even partial recovery. Penrose and Jane both knew that Mrs. Trevenna might linger on for months in this death in life, but that they would never be able to reach her poor lost mind any more. Mary Trevenna's mind had never been of much account. In her lively, girlish days even she had not been clever, and ever since she had reached the maturity of womanhood it had been slowly growing

duller and more obscured. Possibly a happy, commonplace married life, with a cheerful, matter-of-fact husband of her own sort, with children about her to sharpen and engross her powers, she might have passed on to old age much as other ordinary women do. Jane thought so. She bore a bitter and undying grudge against Penrose's father, who had first warped the even straightness of her sister's life; but there was a strain of weakness and incapacity in Mary that might have developed in any case. No one can tell how it might have been. It was clear enough that she was dying now by inches, though only in middle age, which is often so vigorous; and the best consolation to the two who alone in all the world loved her, and cared to keep alive the fading embers of what had been at best a feeble fire, was that the end was perfectly painless and as peaceful as the ending of life can be. Penrose had

no wild grief or regret to bear now, only a deep, still sorrow and a profound pity for the poor imperfect finish to a halting, maimed existence.

She could hardly wish her mother to live, and she had not the added bitterness which Jane kept so closely to herself, the dread of the "something after death,' which might be harder than life on the unconscious sinner, as Jane considered her. Jane's one hope was that her own constant anguish of faithful prayer might take the place of that repentance which her sister had never seemed properly to feel, and which *now* was as impossible to her as love or joy or any other sensation but breathing, dimly seeing, and swallowing. Penrose had no such fear, no such misery to endure. She was as sure of God's compassion as of her own, and that was a certain and infinite thing which could only be born of the certain and the infinite. Somewhere, somewhen, somehow,

the deficiencies would be made up, the faults forgiven, and the already dead soul would live in a world which would make up for the failures and sorrows of this.

The slow sluggish stream was bearing her mother out of her reach. Even now she could not make her feel or get at her through the veil that covered her torpid spirit; but there is no stream that does not flow into the wide ocean at last—and the ocean is God.

She sat quiet, sad, but not despairing, thinking long, long thoughts in the darkness of the silent room, when the servant came in, with elaborate shuffling precautions against the remote chance of disturbing that inert figure on the bed, to whisper to her that Mr. Geoffrey Trevenna wanted to see her in the dining-room.

Penrose was surprised. Yesterday evening he had been there, and had told her he should be busy and engaged all

that day. What could have brought him? But she was always glad to see him. She made sure that there was no change in her mother, that she was still sunk in that repose which they called "sleep," and then she went to find out what Geoffrey could want of her.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Penrose found not only Geoffrey but his companion, sunk back in an armchair, and greeting her with a frightened tremulous smile and outstretched hand, without rising, she stopped short from sheer amazement, and stood gazing in silent wonder on the apparition of Viola. The visible signs of her astonishment embarrassed one if not both of her visitors. Geoffrey dashed into a hasty and stumbling explanation which explained nothing at first to Penrose. The only idea she arrived at was that Viola was ill. Naturally the impulse to help followed,

naturally to one of her nature. She bent over the girl.

"Why, Viola dear, what is it? You are quite pale and cold. You are not well?"

Viola tried to laugh. It was a forced hysterical little attempt. She kept tight hold of Penrose's warm strong fingers.

"I have run away, Penrose. You must know it sooner or later. No, I am not ill, not specially so—only overdone, nearly worn out with the struggle and misery of it. I could not go on and be forced into that marriage."

"So you came to me," Penrose said. Then, glancing with a look of bewilderment at her cousin, "But Geoffrey—how is *Geoffrey* here? Did he bring you? Did you come—together?"

"Yes; but not as you think," Viola said hastily, a painful blush rising in her thin face.

She had calmed down. The passion

and exaltation, the fever of her mood had suddenly subsided, and she saw for the first time, plainly, how wild the step she had taken had been. The shame of a carefully guarded and delicate nature had come upon her, and Penrose's clear, asking eyes demanded an explanation.

"You must try and understand," she said, low and quickly, letting her voice drop as if she wished Geoffrey not to hear.

He moved away at the hint, and partly turned from them. Penrose's eyes followed him for a moment. They noted the signs of confusion, of perplexity about him, then they returned to Viola.

"You must not think badly of me," the faltering voice whispered. "I want you to help, to be kind to me, Penrose. I tell you I could not bear the thought—the thought of—you can guess—as it came nearer and nearer, I woke up and realized that I must escape that fate, or it would

kill me. I am not made like you. I am not strong or brave. I ought never to have allowed such a possibility to come upon me. All the fathers and mothers in the world should never have persuaded me. I told you, you remember, that I hated him. I hated him more and more. At last, I think, it almost drove me mad. I felt I must go away; I did not know where to go. I did not think of you. I only thought of Geoffrey, and the time we were so happy, before things changed. So I went to him. It was he who thought of you. He said you would be good to me. Penrose! You *will?*"

Penrose sat down by her, she put her arm about her and kissed her. Penrose was not a caressing person, her kisses were rare, they meant much. This one seemed the fervent promise of help, the seal of a compact. Geoffrey had brought Viola to her—Geoffrey trusted her to be "good to her." What it all meant—what

readjustment of the future, what swift and sudden slaughter of all vague, dreamy, personal hopes, she had not time now to consider. She had this trust put upon her, it would be enough for the moment simply to fulfil it.

Of course it was all plain enough. Geoffrey and Viola had loved each other, had never really left off loving. Fate had again thrown them together, and Penrose, *their friend*—she kept repeating to herself that she was their friend—must help them to their happiness. With all the simple, chivalrous courage of a maiden knight, Penrose armed her soul with self-devotion and vowed it to their service.

"I will be as good as I know how to be," she said, with the plain directness of speech which covered deep feeling. "I do not see yet what I can do; but I won't fail you, Viola, be sure of that."

"The first thing you can do for her, Penrose," Geoffery broke in abruptly,

with an attempt at speaking lightly and easily, "is to get her to bed—to let her sleep—not to think any more. There'll be time enough for that. She is worn out—she has had no rest lately; we must not have her ill."

"I shall not be ill, Geoff," Viola said, smiling at him, almost her old smile. "I feel as if I had done with unrest and misery. I have put myself into your hands, yours and Penrose's; you will see that nothing bad happens to me now."

"But there is one thing, Viola, first," Penrose said slowly. "There is your mother. It will not be right to let this be now while your mother is—she must be—anxious and miserable about you. You must think of her."

It was characteristic of the stern conscientiousness that could never let a wrong rest without an attempt at righting it, which was part of that Amazon soul of hers, that Penrose should think of this

side of Viola's flight, which Viola herself —the spoilt darling of that mother—hardly seemed to regard. She looked piteous in a moment, pleading with those pathetic eyes of hers.

"What can I do, Penrose? Mother knows I am safe; I wrote and told her. To-morrow I will tell her everything."

"No," Penrose said inexorably, "she must know to-night." She rose as she spoke, and stood erect, with that brave head of hers thrown back a little, her hands behind her, with the aspect of the leader of a forlorn hope. "She must not be left to be wretched about you. You are her only child."

Tears flooded the deep blue eyes, the soft baby mouth trembled. "I cannot do any more; I am so tired. Penrose, I must rest; indeed I must."

"You must not be hard on her," Geoffrey said hastily, almost angrily. He did not once look at Penrose. It seemed to her

he was at enmity with her. He had lost all his old affectionate way; he seemed only to think of Viola. "She is not fit to do anything; she must sleep."

Penrose hid the wound he gave her as she hid all her wounds; but it hurt her. He might have spoken, have looked differently. Yet she tried to put all reproach out of her voice, and to make it sound just as usual.

"I am not hard on her, Geoffrey. I want her to rest; but if her mother knows, and is a little satisfied about her, Viola will be more at ease, better able to sleep. I am not asking her to do anything. I will go and see Mrs. Field now, directly."

"*You*—you will, Penrose? How good you are!"

"Not at all," she answered briefly and calmly. "I am only sorry for Mrs. Field. I know what it is to be an only daughter. In old times, when mother was well, she would get anxious for nothing. I think

it is harder than anything to know that she is past being anxious about me now."

She was surprised by a sob climbing in her throat; she had thought herself beyond the stage of crying. Action was her remedy, not talk. She made Viola comfortable in her own room, her own bed, since there was no other ready, and she should be with her mother. Then she came back into the sitting-room, where Geoffrey was, dressed to go out, looking almost like a nun in her plain bonnet and long grey cloak, with the resolute, pale face that had no yielding in it.

Geoffrey was sunk back in his chair. There was something in his eyes, in the restlessness of his features, as he glanced at her for a moment only, which struck her as new in him, and strange in a lover whose love had come back to him.

"Then you are going to the Fields'? Do you wish—do you think it better to be alone?"

"Yes."

"And you are not—I mean you don't shrink from such a disagreeable task? Mrs. Field may be—Mrs. Field is sure to be—very angry as well as anxious."

"They can hardly be angry with *me*," Penrose answered calmly; "but if they are, I am not afraid, it will not hurt me. I think I can manage. I could not bear to think of that poor woman fretting her heart out about her daughter."

"And you are not afraid of leaving your own mother?"

"No. There is no change, there is not likely to be. She will not miss me for a couple of hours. What am I saying? You know, Geoffrey, she never misses me now. She has quite, quite gone out of my reach." Tears gleamed in the steadfast grey eyes. Penrose dashed them away. "Don't let us waste time, Geoffrey. Will you call me a cab?"

"I will come with you, of course. I

could not let you go our errands alone, if I can't help you any other way."

"I had rather you did not, please," she said eagerly—"much rather. I am not in the least nervous or incapable of taking a drive by myself; you must know that. I would really much prefer your waiting here till I come back."

He did not urge his request. She was not a woman to say things for the sake of having them combated. He obeyed her without another word.

Penrose hardly knew *why* she so strongly desired to go without him, but she knew well enough that she *did*. Perhaps the half-hour's silent, solitary drive would be a good time to prepare for the interview, to think over what she had to say, what plea to urge for the runaway daughter. She was grateful to Geoffrey for understanding her so far and letting her have her way. She supposed she was growing, and would grow, more and more strong-

willed. Women who have got to live alone must be, though it is a pity to lose the grace of yielding. She would be a stern, reserved, hard old maid some day; but her heart at least, she hoped, would not be hard. It was not now, it was soft with sympathy, yet it ached somehow. She wondered vaguely why it ached so. She pressed her hand on her side. It is curious how physical a pain that heartache is! She was unhappy about her mother, about the loneliness that was gathering upon her like a great grey enveloping cloud. She was young, quite young, and youth rebels against being alone. That was what ailed her, of course. But, with the rigid honesty of all her self-communings, Penrose suddenly knew that *that* was not all. She had been a fool, she had been cherishing dreams in which a life that was *not* lonely had shone dimly before her—a life sweetened by sympathy, warmed by love. An hour or two ago, when she sat

musing by her mother's bed, she had been sorrowful, but it had not been a bitter sorrow. Her heart had been heavy for her mother's slow drifting away; but it had not ached as it did now. The dream was broken; she awoke to the chill reality of her position. She must bear to be alone, as others had borne it. She must help Geoffrey and Viola to a joy which she should never know. That brave Rosalind had found it a bitter thing "to look at happiness through another's eyes." Yes, it *was* bitter. False statements mend nothing. To call hard soft, and bitter sweet, availed no one a jot. The only difficulty was to be sure one did not get mean enough to *envy* other people who were happy. Envy, jealousy, spite—these were hateful, paltry, creeping things that a woman who honoured her own soul would shake off with loathing.

Britomart did not envy the Amorets of the world, she did not repine at the warrior

life, which meant hardship and denial. Our Britomart was free from such a vice, and steeled herself to endure the thick of the battle, which life, for her, must be.

"I was a fool. I did fancy he might love me. But I see now I was a fool, and I am not going to be so any more. Of course he loves Viola; he has always loved her, he has her again for his own. I *will* be glad that he is happy; I will—I will."

The cab stopped at the foot of the broad flight of steps which led up to the entrance portico of Mr. Field's big pretentious house as the church clock chimed the quarter before eleven. It was late; but Penrose was sure she would not find that Viola's mother had gone to rest. She told the cabman to wait; and, running swiftly up the steps, she rang the bell with a fearless hand. She had made up her mind what to say, and felt absolutely sure of herself. The door opened, and

the footman stared in surprise at the girl's figure in the plain grey cloak. Yes, Mrs. Field was up; he would ask if she could see Miss—he begged pardon—Miss Trevenna. He showed her into the small morning-room below, turned up the gas, and went to find Mrs. Field.

CHAPTER X.

PENROSE had been sorry for Mrs. Field before, the maternal instincts of her nature rising in sympathy for the disappointed and frightened mother; but she was more sorry when she met her face to face, and saw her white countenance with all its usual placid comeliness blurred and spoilt. She went eagerly to meet her, without any formal address.

"Oh, Mrs. Field, do not be anxious about Viola! She is at our house—quite safe now. Indeed, you need not fret any more!"

Anger took the place of grief in a

moment. All Mrs. Field's emotions were easy, common, uncomplicated. She had the uncultured feelings of a woman whose refinement was but a veneer.

"And pray what right had you inciting my child to run away as if she'd been ill-treated? Making such a scandal as she'll never outlive, and half worrying me to death! As if I hadn't been the best of mothers!"

"I did not incite her to run away; I did not know anything of it," Penrose said. "But I did try and persuade her to break off a marriage which was terrible to her."

"Terrible! A marriage with a man who adored her, who denied her nothing —a man who had been her friend since she was a child; but that's all over! He wouldn't have her now. I shouldn't have grieved so much over that either, if she'd done it differently; but just within a week of the wedding—everything ready—to

make a scandal that will never be forgotten." The catalogue of these woes proved too much for Mrs. Field, who began to weep copiously.

Penrose's soul revolted against the pure conventionalism of this grief. The mother could have borne to see her daughter sold, an unloving, shrinking bride, to the highest bidder. She could not bear the chatter of the world in which she lived and moved and had her being.

"Scandals may be forgotten," she said, in a strong, almost stern voice; "gossip may be lived down; but to marry—to give one's life to a man one hates could never be. It was late to do it, much too late, I know, to do it well, but not too late to save Viola from such a hateful lot."

"You take a great deal on yourself, Miss Trevenna," Mrs. Field said, trying to speak with a chilling hauteur which was not natural to her. "I don't know what Viola is to you."

"She is my friend. I care for her. And I care for my cousin—for Geoffrey Trevenna."

"For Geoffrey Trevenna! Is *he* mixed up in this?"

"Yes; Viola went to him, poor child! She did not know where to go. She was very desperate, miserable, and—ill."

"Ill! Is she really ill?"

"Mrs. Field," Penrose said, putting her whole heart into her few, strong, impressive words, "Viola's *life*, I believe, hangs on this. I think she would have died if she had married Mr. Lees. You must let her have the wish of her heart—she must have Geoffrey."

The mother's heart, softening at the familiar idea of Viola's frailty, had fastened on the word *illness*.

"Where is she? Can I go to her? You're keeping something from me. The poor darling is in danger."

"No, no; indeed not! She is resting

quite quietly—she will sleep well, I believe —in my bed. I will take as much care of her as if she were my sister; but to-night, it is late, you had better not disturb her."

"What do you mean by talking of her dying?" the mother asked, bursting into angry sobs. "As if I'd been cruel to her—as if I wouldn't do anything for her; but as to marrying Geoffrey Trevenna after all this, her father would never consent—he's dreadfully angry."

"Oh, he would! Surely he would, if her life depended on it. Mrs. Field, it *must* be so. They love each other—they *must* be happy." She paused a moment then hurried into further speech, while her face crimsoned with a kind of shame. She was offering a bribe, a disgraceful bribe; she was indignant at the meanness, yet she felt that she must do it. "Will you tell him something from

me? It may not make any difference, I know it cannot make what was wrong right. Yet you ought to know. Geoffrey lost Redwood, through me—through my mother—he was deceived and disappointed. I have made up my mind that when my mother dies I shall give Redwood back to him. He will not be poor then."

"Miss Trevenna!" Mrs. Field stood astonished, aghast, yet the dawn of a new hope cleared and brightened her face. If this strange, abrupt girl was in earnest, how much easier that terrible task of conciliating her husband would be! Geoffrey—with Redwood—was a possible husband for Viola. "Miss Trevenna! you don't mean it—you can't be in earnest!"

Penrose half smiled, it was such desperate earnest to her. "Do I look as if I were not?" she said briefly. "I mean it with all my heart. It would be

no sacrifice. Mother and I were not happy at Redwood. I do not think, even if she lived—and she will not live—that we could ever go back there. If I had enough, just enough to live upon, and could stay in London and work hard, that is what I should do. My mother is dying. It will not be long before Geoffrey will have Redwood, for it will be mine, and I can do what I choose with it."

The strangeness of this girl's ways, her extraordinary yet simple generosity, the calm manner of speaking about her mother's death, all confounded and bewildered Mrs. Field, whose whole being was ruled by convention. People don't talk like that, in unvarnished, plain speech, about death and bereavement. Didn't she care for her mother? or was it only a want of knowledge of "the proper thing?" But there was an extraordinary advantage in ignorance or carelessness which resulted in such a gift.

"You mean to give Redwood to Geoffrey? But perhaps—I hope—your mother will recover?"

"No. My mother will not recover."

Somehow Mrs. Field vaguely realized that it was *not* indifference which made her speak thus. She murmured a faint word of sympathy. Penrose did not acknowledge it. She went on with the determination which had so far carried her to her point.

"I have quite resolved—nothing will make any difference to me—that Geoffrey shall have Redwood. And he *must* have Viola too. You care too much for her not to consent."

"It—it is all very difficult and painful," Mrs. Field stammered; "but I would never be against her happiness — she ought to have told me. Of course this would make a difference to Mr. Field; and, if Viola comes home to-morrow—she will, of course—perhaps people needn't

know everything — I could make the servants hold their tongues."

"Viola will not come home till she has your promise that she shall marry Geoffrey," Penrose said brusquely. "I shall not persuade her to do so. Mrs. Field—I must not stay—you will remember what I have said? I mean every word, *every word.* If you come to-morrow to fetch Viola, and you can tell her that you and her father have consented, she will go home with you—if she is happy she may be well."

Mrs. Field resented the tone inwardly, but it is one thing to tell an interfering girl that she is presumptuous and impertinent, and another to say the same when she holds the gift of a fortune out with as little hesitation as if she were offering a pin. There is a respect due to such a reckless giver, however much one may resent her dictation.

"I—I will consult Mr. Field," she said,

trying to speak with dignity. "You are very generous and noble, I'm sure, to make such an offer."

"It is only just," Penrose said simply; "we ought not to have it. It made us miserable. Good night, Mrs. Field—what may I say from you to Viola?"

Mrs. Field began to shed tears again. "Give her my—my love—and my blessing. She's been very cruel and ungrateful, but she couldn't have thought how it would half break my heart, and I can't be angry with her long. She's all I have."

The real, fond, simple motherhood came to the surface, and Penrose was sorry for her.

She took her hand and pressed it. "It *was* cruel to you," she said gently. "I felt it was. But you will be happy again when you have her back. Good night—good-bye!"

When Penrose got home, at midnight, and entered the room she had left on her

late errand very softly, creeping in with her latch-key, to disturb no one in the quiet house, she found Geoffrey sitting where she had left him. He started up as she entered; but it was evident he had not been asleep. He was very pale, and he looked curiously worn—not in the least degree radiant, or flushed with hope and love. A strange doubt, half fear, half—what? thrilled through Penrose for the first time. No; she would not entertain it! He used to love Viola—he loved her now. People don't change in a twelvemonth, that is to say, not in minds like hers, we can but judge others by ourselves. She was going to alter those strange looks of his, he was anxious, in suspense, frightened for Viola. She could turn it all into happiness. She had good news for him.

"Geoffrey," she said impetuously, though under her breath, sounds echoed so strangely loud in the silence, "you must

not be so anxious. You have been afraid how this might turn out. Don't be afraid —it will all be as you wish."

"Will it, Penrose?" he answered, with an odd wistful glance. "And how is that?"

"I have seen Mrs. Field"—she hurried out her explanation confusedly, busying herself with taking off her cloak, etc., and not looking at him in her usual, direct, frank fashion—"she was angry and upset, of course; but she was all right in the end, there—there won't be any difficulty. They will not stand in Viola's way any more. They will allow it to be—to be as it was before with you and her, Geoffrey."

"And what miracle have you been working for us, Penrose? How could you bring this about?"

She wished, in a confused sort of way, that he wouldn't speak so oddly, she did not seem able to understand him. But

she was not clever, she believed, at understanding people, and Geoffrey often baffled her.

"I think," she said, with a burning face, turning in an aimless way to arrange things in the room—"I think Mrs. Field would really be ready to do anything that was best for Viola."

"Yes; *Mrs.* Field. But Viola has a father."

"I told her," Penrose hurried on—"I told her that Viola would not bear to be—I mean that she must be happy. I feel that—it made them see, of course—this action of hers—how wretched she was. And I was able to tell them that if she—if she married you, she would not be marrying a poor man. That made a difference; for, though Mrs. Field is a kind, fond mother, she does care for money, you know, and of course her husband cares more."

"Yes. That is an open secret. That

is not a wonderful discovery of yours, Penrose. But what *is* wonderful is how you managed to make them see black white, or in other words, that I am not a poor man!"

"You are, *now*, what you, and they, call a poor man," she said nervously, arranging and rearranging the few ornaments on the mantelpiece; "but before long you will not be so. I told Mrs. Field that you will have Redwood when my mother dies."

"I—have—Redwood! You are mad, Penrose. I will never have it—it will be yours."

He came close to her and laid a fierce hand on her shoulder, grasping it unconsciously with a grip which hurt her, almost shaking her. He was himself shaken through and through with a painful and passionate emotion.

"I tell you," he repeated, through his teeth, "it is madness to say so. I would

not take Redwood from you, Penrose; I could not bear it."

She faced him for the first time, letting her great earnest pleading eyes fall on his and burn into his heart. She clasped the arm that held her in both her hands and pressed it with unconscious force to emphasize the words that came from the deepest depth of her soul.

"Geoffrey, you *could* bear it, and you must. Nothing, no one in the whole world, no, not God Himself, I believe, could prevent my doing this. And if you refused me a hundred hundred times it would make no difference, only you would never be so cruel! Redwood is hateful to me now—it would be a thousand times more hateful if it were my own. I should loathe my life. There are many things I could bear; but not that—that loneliness. But to know that *you* had it, you and Viola, that you were happy there, fond of it, glad of it; that your children might

grow up there—in that dismal house that was never home to us, that seemed as if it had a curse for us—to be merry—to take away the gloom and the silence of it—*this* is what must be, shall be, what I have set my heart upon! You can't prevent it, Geoffrey. My will is strong, stronger than yours. But it would be far better, far, far happier for me if you took it freely, gladly, as a *right*. I feel that it is your right. At first, while my mother was well, it was different. I understood that it might perhaps be *her* right, and that to be a little poor would not hurt you. But now there is everything to be said on one side, nothing on the other. If you take it hard, Geoffrey, I shall know that you are too proud to let me give you anything, and that you don't care enough for me."

"I! I not care? Oh, Penrose!" He groaned out the words.

She was almost afraid of them, and

hastened to speak again. "It is my wedding gift to you and Viola. You'll take it from your friend—your cousin that you were so good to?"

"Good! To *you*—my God! I'm not worthy to kiss your feet. Penrose, you don't know, you'll never guess how you have tortured me."

"No, no, no," she pleaded with him with her eyes, her voice, her eager hands. "No, Geoffrey, don't say that to me when I have been thinking of nothing but how best to make you happy. Indeed, indeed that's all I care for!"

"I know—I know, my dear. I know you now, through and through." He gently put her away from him, and turned his back on her. The room was rather dark, he hoped she did not see that there were tears in his eyes, scalding reluctant tears. He remembered Viola upstairs—his promise to her, her trust in him, her passion—poor child, poor little Viola!

There are times when it is almost impossible to chain down the leaping words that pant to have their way ; but it may be that such words once released would make havoc with more lives than one. He longed, with all his soul, passionately longed to tell Penrose what he felt for her —of her—to throw himself at her knees and kiss her very dress. She was so noble, so unconscious, so far, far higher than even his thought of her! But it was not safe—he dared not trouble her generous soul with the storm that shook his. There was Viola—there were all the days to come to think of. He was pledged to Viola, Penrose could stand alone. But it would have been less difficult to bear, he thought, if Penrose had spared him any more entreaty in that full, soft voice, that was not like hers as she went on urging her plea, as if she were asking for her own future happiness.

" It will make me happy ; it is the only

thing that will make me happy. Just think, Geoffrey, after my mother is gone—how could I bear to go into that great dreary place—to live there? I, alone? I will keep enough, more than enough to live here, in London, or to travel as I choose, and to learn to be really an artist. I have planned it all. That is what I wish most to be; to work hard, to do something. I shall get rid of the burden of Redwood and be free and—and—happy"—the word was a little faltering—"as happy as I can be when I have not mother. It will make no real difference if you refuse to take Redwood, for it will be yours, only it will make a difference to me. I shall be glad for you to take it like a friend."

"I will take it, Penrose. Like a friend, from a friend, just because you ask me, and to show that I can understand how dear and true and noble you are."

"God bless you, Geoffrey!"

"God bless you."

They held their hands out to each other by one impulse. Each had conquered, and each felt the humbler for the victory. He lifted first one hand of hers then the other to his lips, pressed them and let them fall. There were no more words possible, he could not even wish her good night.

In a minute Penrose was alone, pausing, waiting to gather strength for what duty came next, for the rest of the long night's watching, for a new day. Something strangely sad yet sweet seemed to have happened to her, she bore a sort of consecration upon her which Geoffrey's lips had sealed on her hands, yet she hardly knew what it was, or what it meant. Only, somehow she was not the same Penrose that she had been that morning, she fancied she never would be. At any rate she was Geoffrey's friend and Viola's friend still.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was strange to Penrose, after an absolutely sleepless night, to find Viola in the morning calmly asleep like a baby. The small face was pale and kept its worn look, and the delicacy of the violet stains on the eyelids, and the blue of the veins were apparent; but the troubled expression was gone. She had thrown off her responsibilities, and could give way to the exhaustion which, in her case, followed swiftly on strong feeling. Penrose stood by her, looking at her. There was plenty of tenderness, protecting tenderness, in her face and in her heart—enough for all Viola's demands; but she

no longer needed to *pity* her. Life was going to be fair and sweet again for the girl who withered under an adverse blast, like her namesake. If she had cared to do it, she might have transferred that pity to herself, for her future was cold, blank, and lonely enough ; but Penrose was not given to self-analysis, self-love, or self-pity. It took all one's mind to *do* things she considered. Yet her fixed grey eyes looked rather mournful as she watched for Viola to wake.

That moment came, the half-dazed, dewy dark blue eyes slowly opened, and bewilderment, with a sort of struggle at comprehension, came into them.

Viola raised herself on her elbows and looked vaguely about her.

"Penrose! It *is* Penrose. I was beginning to think I had dreamt it all. Oh, I remember—I was too tired to keep awake—you went to see them at home."

"Yes. I saw your mother. She will

come and fetch you to-day. She was very much troubled about you."

"I will not go home unless they are satisfied to let me alone. I will never make it up with Mr. Lees," Viola cried, with a feeble sort of vehemence, the painful pink flush burning on her cheek-bones, which gave her such a look of fragility.

"They know that—your mother understands," Penrose said quickly. "You will never be asked. I am quite sure they will let you marry as you wish."

The colour sank and then rose again. "Are you *certain?* It is all very well to speak of mummy; she would give in, I know. But father hates Geoffrey now—he will be terribly angry."

"I think—I am not sure, but I think your father will feel differently, for things are different. Geoffrey will not be, as he supposes, a poor barrister much longer. Geoffrey will have Redwood very soon."

"Penrose! What can you mean? Have Redwood? It is your mother's."

"My mother will not live long," Penrose said, turning away, but speaking still with resolute calm, "you know that. And afterwards Redwood will be Geoffrey's."

"But, Penrose—how can that be? I thought it would be yours—is there anything wrong with—with Mr. Trevenna's will?"

"It will be mine, to do what I choose with, and I choose to give it to my cousin. I hate Redwood, I should be miserable if I had to live there; I would never consent to that; I shall lead a life that suits me. I promised your mother that I would do this, and it—it made a difference." Penrose had intended no sarcasm; but Viola winced a little.

"They would be willing to take all that from you! It would be horribly mean. Why should you give everything away for my sake?"

"It is *not* everything. It is only something that I don't value. And it is not only for you—it is for Geoffrey. He was brought up to look forward to having Redwood, it was cruel and unjust to take it from him. He did not seem to resent it. He was kind to mother and me who robbed him. It is only right to give it back to him, and I *will* do it."

She drew a long breath, and the last words came out with vehement force. Viola lay and watched her, wondering, admiring, almost overpowered by the strength that swayed her which way it would.

"I seem so tired out," she sighed, "as if I could hardly think. I can do nothing more—nothing at all. You must despise me, Penrose; I am so weak and you are so strong, but I cannot help it. I believe it must be that I am just physically exhausted. It is odd how numbed and strange I feel. I ought to be happy—

grateful to you—I know I ought; but just now I can feel nothing but that I have not got to suffer—to go through all that made me miserable. When I have rested, and am stronger, I shall be able to feel it all; but I do love you, stupid and dazed as I feel—I do indeed!"

"Yes, you are tired—you are worn out; I understand," Penrose said gently. "You need to be taken care of, and made to rest. I don't want *gratitude*—that is a cold, hateful thing. If you and Geoffrey are fond of me—if I may be a sister to you—I have no one belonging to me——"

She would not let the firm voice falter; she dared not begin to give way, as happier people might do. She had got to keep up strength for all that pressed upon her, and there is nothing more enervating than to be sorry for one's self. She put on a most matter-of-fact manner.

"Viola, you must not talk yet; you must not try even to rouse yourself. Just

keep quite still and quiet. I am going down to get you some breakfast; I had mine long ago. It is past ten o'clock. Then, you can rest while I help Jane with mother; and perhaps, by twelve o'clock, you will be ready to get up. You must not mind my leaving you—I shall have to attend to my mother. If you want me when you are tired of being here, I will come and be your maid."

"How is your mother, Penrose dear?"

"She does not change. She breathes, and moves, and eats a little—that is all."

Mrs. Field had not had an easy task to calm down her husband, who was at first positively furious against Viola, who had rebelled against his favourite project and ill-treated his own particular intimate, besides making herself a mark for all the scandal-loving tongues about them. But, by alternate coaxing and threatening; by endless wordy argument and the feminine

one of tears; by quoting the favourite doctor who had warned them of Viola's peculiar delicacy of constitution; by finally and ingeniously bringing to bear her strongest weapon, Penrose's intentions with regard to Redwood, she conquered so far as to make him consent to her fetching Viola home, and trying, as far as possible, to hush up the talk that was inevitable. The wedding must be at once spoken of as "postponed;" a decent time must elapse before the other one must follow, but not too long, for the trousseau that was ready would come in as well for Mrs. Geoffrey Trevenna as Mrs. Thomas Lees. The grand wedding, all the fuss and finery in which her soul had revelled, must be given up; but no one knew better than Mrs. Field how soon a nine-days' wonder is forgotten in the whirl of the world. Mr. Field, who hated to be exposed to anything disagreeable, refused to see Mr. Lees; he would write to him, however.

He also refused to see Viola—he was too mad with her, he said; there'd only be a scene and a bother. So he chose to manage a business-journey to the continent, which would take him a week. Oh yes, the girl could come home! Her mother could fuss and cuddle her to her heart's content; she had been utterly spoilt by it all, as he had always said. Geoffrey might visit them, he supposed; it wasn't the fellow's fault, he allowed, that Viola had behaved like a love-sick fool. Of course Mr. Trevenna *of Redwood* was a different person to the struggling barrister, who might never make more than a bare living of his profession, even if he did that. This matter so far favourably settled, Mrs. Field was ready to receive her prodigal daughter with open arms, and delighted to announce that "Papa had gone away for a week, so that Viola need not be afraid of being scolded." It was an immense relief to the girl to escape this.

Her mother's soothing treatment was in reality just what she needed. The maternal instinct was right; Viola was in no state for violent reproaches or anything but comforting. She did not know, for her mother was afraid of telling her, that Mr. Lees, red and scowling with wrath, had called and asked to see her. Mrs. Field prevented the meeting successfully, but the man swore, half aloud, that he would not be balked, he'd have it out yet. A paragraph appeared in the papers that had announced the intended wedding, that the affair was put off. It was allowed to leak out that the postponement meant a final stop to it all, and that there had been some sort of quarrel, which had ended in the breaking off of the marriage. "An old love-affair" was spoken of, and that naturally suggested Mr. Trevenna's name. It was pretty generally understood that the bridegroom who should carry off Mr. James Field's pretty heiress would bear

the name of Trevenna, not Lees. Under her mother's soothing regime of unlimited petting, to which she returned eagerly as soon as the crisis was passed, backed up by her favourite doctor's grave assurance that Viola's health would not stand rough treatment, Viola seemed to go back to her former look of delicate brightness. She had everything her own way while her father was from home, and even when he returned she had nothing worse than some frowns and cross words to encounter. He had given up resisting the domestic decree which banished his friend Tom Lees and reinstated Geoffrey Trevenna. His plan was to have the couple quietly married, "out of the way," as he expressed it, somewhere in the country after they had left town. But Geoffrey interposed. He seemed in as great a hurry as a bridegroom ought to be. The wedding should on every account be quiet, but it would really be less noticed in London than anywhere

else; there were many reasons why it was more convenient, and as to the talk that anyway must be got over, it would not hurt any of them in the long run. Mrs. Field strenuously backed him up. She was not in a hurry to lose her daughter; but, since that was inevitable, she wanted the worry over. She thought Viola would be perfectly recovered when Geoffrey took her to Norway in a friend's yacht, which was to be their honeymoon. A voyage was prescribed as the very best thing for her. Viola was a good sailor, and loved the sea. She was to be married in her travelling-dress; the magnificent brocade which had been ordered before was too full of connections with what she now shuddered at. Everything she wore was to be bought new for the occasion. Nobody was told what day was fixed, no one was asked, except Penrose—if her mother could spare her.

Everything seemed to be spreading out

smooth after the tangle and confusion from which events had emerged. Geoffrey was quietly devoted, kind, gentle, somehow graver and older by many years than his former self, Viola thought; but she found no fault. He was good to her; he spoilt her, as every one else did; he was the kindest lover a girl could have. She did not miss the younger, more impetuous, more passionate one of former days. On the whole, his gentleness suited her present state best, for—though she seemed to have, and was considered to be, perfectly recovered—she had an instinct which warned her off all strong emotions. She was bright enough, in a fitful, charming way sometimes, when Geoffrey was with her; but generally she was inclined to be languid, and let herself be waited on without trying to exert either mind or body. Neither she nor Geoffrey had seen much of Penrose since Viola had gone home. She hardly ever left her mother. There

was not much change, the state in which she was might continue yet some time, till she had another attack; there were gleams of half-consciousness which Jane and Penrose watched for with intense eagerness, though they amounted to so little. Now and then the dull, dim eyes opened with the slightest trace of intelligence, and rested on one or other of them a little longer, with a little more perception than usual. Once or twice the pale drawn lips seemed to move into the formation of a word, perhaps only their names. Penrose felt as if life had not much to give her just then, and these poor, faint consolations were enough to be thankful for. Before long she should not even have them—no mother to tend, no daily care to fill up the empty hours, no one belonging first and foremost to her except Jane, who loved her, she knew, as well as her mother had ever done, with a strong, silent love which would never change or fail her;

but who was so silent, so reticent, so incapable of expression, that she could never really be a *companion*, though a friend she was and would be.

Penrose did not expect Geoffrey to come much to see her now. She did not resent his absence; he was busy; he was taken up with Viola. But she missed him, half unconsciously, all the time. She had some friends, and was grateful to them with all her heart. Mr. Grey came up to town for some scientific meeting, and he and his sister, Mrs. Morrison, were exceedingly good to her. Mrs. Morrison had given up trying to get Penrose away from her mother's sick-room, but she called twice a week regularly, and cheered the girl with her robust, kindly optimism. Mr. Grey was, however, more sympathetic to her just now, when her mood was a little too sad for Mrs. Morrison's perpetual cheeriness. He was never a high-spirited man, but he was equable and serene. He

had lived through many sorrows, and never been without the consolation of a deep, strong, child-like faith. He had an atmosphere of gentle calm about him which did Penrose good; and he was heartily fond of her in a fatherly way, which sat prettily on his modest old bachelorhood. She was looking much too pale and thin, he told her; she must have regular exercise, and he called every morning for her to walk with him to the British Museum, where he was making some researches. The London season had grown old and stale; the streets were beginning to have the degraded, exhausted look which is most marked in August and September. Houses were closed in the fashionable parts, the window-boxes were shabby, the pavements had lost their trim look, omnibuses, covered with luggage, invaded the stations, for it was nearing the end of July. But Mr. Grey did not complain; he was not quick at noticing

anything, and he seemed content to walk in the untidy London streets as in his own picturesque Oxford.

He asked many questions of Penrose about Geoffrey, the news of whose approaching marriage had greatly astonished him. Penrose answered all she could without flinching. She shrank, however, from the disclosure which she wanted to make, of her intentions with regard to Redwood, till one day Mr. Grey asked her, in his stammering, gentle way, whether she ever thought of returning there, for, if not, a friend of his would be willing to take it for a time as it stood. Penrose felt herself colouring; but she knew her companion was too short-sighted to see, and this was an opportunity not to be missed.

"No," she said abruptly. "I shall never go back to Redwood."

"Never! That is rather too decisive, my dear; you surely don't mean that?"

"Yes. Mr. Grey, I do. You know my mother cannot live long—when she is—is dead"—Penrose would not use euphemisms, as many do — "Redwood will belong to Geoffrey Trevenna. I hope he—they—will settle to live there."

Mr. Grey was so startled and surprised he stopped short, and peered in her face, he had to look *up* at her, for he was a small man.

"My dear! It will belong to Geoffrey Trevenna! What can you mean? By your—your father's will, it will in that case revert to *you*."

"Yes. I know. By law, but not by justice. I feel that Geoffrey *ought* to have it—don't you think so too?"

"N-no—I don't know. I felt for him at the time—I thought him hardly treated. I told Richard so; but it was your father's will, my dear."

"Yes," she said, with sudden bitterness; "but I owe less than nothing to my father.

Don't be hurt," she said; imploringly, touching her friend's arm. "I know you cared for him; but you must feel that at least *I* have no cause to respect his memory."

"He tried to set the old wrong right."

"I suppose that *may* have been his motive," she said coldly; "but it only made us unhappy. My mother has never been herself since that time, and we hated Redwood! I am only *glad* to have done with it."

"Ah," Mr. Grey said sadly, "he told me it was too late. I suppose it was." Then, after a long pause he went on. "You may be right, my child, at any rate you are certainly very generous. But what about your own life? Will you come to me? Will you let me have a daughter in my old age?"

"Oh, how good you are to think of it!" Penrose cried, with a sudden melting

of the clear grey eyes into the softness of tears. "I shall be so glad often to stay with you; but I think—I have planned—you must not think me ungrateful—for a time I want to try and really study art. If I do that I must have a studio in London. Mr. Lyons can find me one near him, and I shall work hard. I believe that will be best for me; but if sometimes I may go to you—I shall feel as if I had a home then."

"You shall have a home with me whenever you want one. You won't live *alone* in London surely, Penrose?"

His tone of horror made her half smile.

"Why, dear Mr. Grey, don't you think me able to take care of myself? But I shall have Jane—you know, don't you, that she is my mother's sister? If I wanted protection she could give it me; but I shall not, indeed."

They walked on in silence, and Mr.

Grey pondered over what she had said. He was only penetrating when he loved any one; he seemed vaguely to understand much which Penrose had never put into words.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was the day before Viola's and Geoffrey's wedding. The quietest ceremony involves a certain occupation and fuss in any class, and of course there were arrangements to be made in this case, which kept Mrs. Field and the servants busy. Viola, however, allowed nothing apparently to disturb her. Something seemed to tell her that she must not permit any excitement, or disturbance of mind or body. She was perfectly strong and well, she said—yes, perfectly; but she could not stand things yet as other people could. She longed for the wedding to be over, serenely over, and to be taken away

from the associations of the last few months into a calm atmosphere of peace and love—alone with Geoffrey, whose very presence, voice, and look, were reviving to her. She was outwardly serene and sweet; but there was an inward fever underneath, of longing for this new life which was going to be a very Paradise of peace.

It was a hot, airless afternoon; the atmosphere of the sunbaked pavements outside was intolerable; but the big double drawing-rooms were as cool as any place could be—all the long windows open on to the balcony, which was full of plants, and carefully shaded by awnings. The room was sweet—a little heavily sweet—with the scent of flowers. Viola always liked to be surrounded by flowers—roses, mignonette, heliotrope, pinks. Viola was alone—leaning, half lying back in a deep luxurious lounging chair—in a white loose summer dress made of the softest, gauziest

wool, with delicate rose-pink ribbons. Her mother was out on a last shopping expedition, she was left to the solitude of the great handsome room, with her own restless, wandering thoughts, which glanced, against her will, from past to future. If she could she would have annihilated the immediate past—it was cruel to be forced again and again to recall some odious episode, which she would have blotted out for ever if she could. She looked a little tired, a little flushed at times, with alternations of paleness, very pretty, very, very fragile. Her little, slim, white useless hands lay idle on her lap—they were hands incapable of the work of life, but were delicious to hold and caress. Her strangely bright, almost feverishly bright dark-blue eyes, were fixed dreamily on vacancy, she was lost in her own reflections, and escaped the immediate sounds and sights which were near her. She did not notice a

sharp imperative ring, the heavy footsteps up the stairs were naturally lost on the thick velvet pile of the carpets. She did hear the door open behind her, however, and a step.

"Is it you Geoff, dear?" she asked, in a soft, languid tone; and slowly turned her head.

When she saw, however, who stood there, she started with a movement of pure terror to her feet. A vivid scarlet flashed all over her face, her neck, to the very roots of her hair, it faded into as intense a white.

Mr. Lees had bided his time. He had nursed his sullen anger and the bitterness of his resentment at the treatment he had received, till the desire for some sort of vengeance goaded his coarse, if not brutal passions into action. He had been denied at the house when he first called; but he had sworn that Viola should not go scot free. She was to be married directly, he

knew, though the actual date was not known by him. She was satisfied now, he supposed, that she had whistled him off, with shameless effrontery, and whistled on her old lover. He had quarrelled with her father openly; but that was not enough, he wanted to punish the "disgraceful little jilt" herself. She had not hurt his *heart* much, perhaps, for Tom Lees' heart was not a pronounced factor in his organization; but she had injured his pride, his self-complacency, his position in society. He knew the fellows at the club sniggered over the situation, he was sure all kinds of ridiculous stories were afloat. Was *he* to be the only sufferer? not if he knew it—he'd give Viola a piece of his mind, at any rate! He was too stupidly blind to everything but his own wrongs and passionate anger with the girl he fancied he had been in love with, to notice anything at all peculiar in her—of course she was overcome with shame at seeing him,

she well might be! No wonder she hadn't a word to say for herself, and could only stare, and stare at him with those great eyes of hers! It was a lucky chance for him that she was alone, and he could have his say. She seemed unable to interrupt him, to excuse herself—naturally—what excuse had she?

"I suppose," he said, in his loud, thick, common voice, louder and harsher than usual—"I suppose you thought you were well rid of me, for good and all. I suppose you thought I meant just to swallow the affront you put on me without saying a word! That I'd be as meek and mum as a saint under such an insult as would enrage even a saint! *You* were just to throw a man off like a dirty glove, and not have a single thing said after it! A pretty time you chose for chucking me—a pretty way! Letting it go on till the marriage day was a week off—letting me waste my substance and my kindness on

you, and then turning round, without a reason, without a single excuse from anything I'd said or done, and leaving me to be a laughing-stock to the whole set! I'd have forgiven it better, perhaps, if you had found out a week or two after you said 'Yes,' that you meant 'No'—that you were hankering all the while after the other fellow that you threw off as you did me, when he lost his chance of property. But there ain't a man living that could forgive the treatment you gave me! Ay—I know you've been flattered and cosseted all your life, you've never heard a plain word of blame before; but, by George, you've got to hear it now! All the fine speeches in the world won't make you anything but a shameful jilt, and it won't be the best beginning of your married life to know you started with spoiling a decent fellow's chances."

A strange cry stopped him, as, still more infuriated by the indulgence of his

anger, he stormed on from loud to louder. Viola had put out her arms, vaguely, tremulously seeking, as it seemed, in a blind and helpless way for a support. There was that in her face, in her fixed yet filmy eyes, in the horrible whiteness that was spreading over her cheeks and lips, in the sharp, curious, agonized cry, half articulate, which seemed to utter words, yet disconnected ones, which suddenly froze and appalled him with a dreadful fear and remorse—all too late to undo the words which he had poured like molten lead upon her.

"Oh, the pain—the pain!"—he seemed to hear her say this. "Oh, why—why—why did they let him come? Geoffrey—the pain—I cannot bear it!"

Some one rushed past Mr. Lees while he made a tremulous, blundering motion to support Viola as her footing gave way. Some one, with a shriek that rang all through the house. It was Viola's mother.

She caught her darling as she tottered and fell heavily forward. Her comely, cheerful, rosy face was transfigured in a moment into a very Niobe's; the agonizing fear of her motherhood, always lurking in her, turned it to a marble sculpture of despair. Then she flashed one terrible, avenging glance on the trembling, frightened man.

"God punish you," she said, in a voice that cut like a knife; "you've killed her!"

He stood absolutely still and dumb for a moment, staring stupidly at Viola, at her mother. Mrs. Field had lifted her on to a little couch; even her terror had not prevented her trying every method she knew of restoring some consciousness, some vitality to the white, inanimate figure.

"She's — she's only fainting, it's nothing more; it can't be anything but a faint," the man stammered at last. He

stumbled to the bell, with an instinct to summon help, and pealed at it; then the dread of Viola, of her mother, who had changed out of all likeness to those he used to know, overpowered him. Pure physical fear made him tremble all over as with ague. No! Come what might, he dared not face it out. The situation in which, a little while ago, he had triumphed with the fierce pleasure of revenge, had become ghastly, horrible, impossible, absolutely unendurable. She would recover. It was nothing but a girlish fainting-fit; women could faint at anything. But he could not stay—he could no longer breathe the air which seemed fatal and heavy with foreboding. As the servant entered and stood aghast, he seized his hat, and, muttering that he'd go round for Dr. Maynard, he rushed out of the room and downstairs, as if the Furies were at his heels. Mrs. Field never noticed that he was gone. She was rubbing

Viola's temples with strong ammonia, loosening her dress, and slipping her hand down to feel her heart. Oh, God! There was no flutter, no motion, not the faintest throb to be felt! She knew—her inmost heart knew—there would never be again; but her outward self was calm, her words utterly denied the awful truth that pierced her all the while.

"William," she said rapidly, but calmly, "Miss Viola has fainted. Take a cab for Dr. Maynard directly. If he's out, bring Mr. Macaulay in the next street, or Dr. Fletcher in the Square. Don't come back without some one—and send Payne instantly."

The footman hurried off; the mother stooped again to call close at the deaf ear.

"Viola—Viola, my precious! Look up, my pet. It's only your own mummy here, there's no one else. There's nothing the matter, darling one. Oh, my dear God!

she won't revive—it is *not* a faint. Oh, how shall I bear it? Viola—darling, dearest, sweet—it will kill your poor mummy! Wake up—come back to me!"

Then, as Payne entered, crying, stammering out words of fright, she changed her tone, imperiously silencing her.

"You fool, Payne! It's nothing but a bad faint. Don't you remember, once before, how long it lasted? Stop crying! How dare you cry? I tell you it is a faint—a faint—a faint!" Each repetition of the word rose higher, shriller, fiercer, into a shriek. She never ceased her wild and fruitless labours to put breath into the stirless breast, the movement of life into the inert and motionless form.

So Viola's old doctor and friend found her. She made way for him swiftly, with a horrible attempt at a smile, searching his grave, kind face with wild eyes in vain for help and reassurance.

"Yes, she's ill, doctor—it's a dreadfully long faint; but she'll come to herself, of course she will."

The doctor knelt down, raised the stiff, slight figure on his arm, looked at her, felt her with the dreadful experience against which there's no appeal, inexorable as Death and Fate. His low, grave voice broke the awful momentary pause that hung over them.

"Has she had a shock—a fright?"

"Yes," gasped the mother. She could not utter another syllable to save her life.

"You know I told you her heart was very weak; she was to be guarded."

"Yes; but I could not—I was out—what could I do? Doctor"—in a frantic scream in which all the mortal anguish of the hour was concentrated—"I tell you *she is not dead!*"

He said not a word—what could he say?—his soul was full of pity; but no pity, no skill can keep death at bay and

death's companion, heart-break. He just glanced round; the footman stood at the door trembling.

"Help me to carry her to her room," he said. And the mother was answered.

CHAPTER XIII.

SO the little bride that was to be—that was never to be—lay dead in her own pretty room. The slender cord of life that would bear no straining had given way with one fierce cut under the cruel tongue that reviled her. The wild-violet eyes had looked their last on their world, the little idle hands were still for ever, the soft child's mouth had stiffened into that awful, stern Sphinx smile that is the dread seal of Death. Even her mother knew, long before she would own it, that the lamp was shattered and the light of her life departed. At first her instinct was to rave against Fate—against

the doctor—most of all against the man "who killed her." Why hadn't she known, she her mother, how frail the thread was? She would never have left her—guarded from every rough wind she might have lived—she might have lived! The doctor sadly shook his grey head.

"No. Nothing could have saved her long. I knew her heart was weak, her constitution very delicate. I told you so many a time; but I did not know, no one knew *how* weak, *how* delicate. She could never have borne the stress and strain of a long life. It is a marvel she survived her delicate childhood."

The wild rage of the first agony over, Viola's mother broke down into tempests of wilder grief. Hers was not a nature to suffer in any quiet way; she must struggle, fight, agonize.

Telegrams had been sent instantly flying to summon those who could do nothing—to Mr. Field at his office, to Geoffrey, to

Mrs. Field's favourite sister. Mr. Field was the first to come. His wife had remembered almost suddenly that her husband was Viola's father, that she had no exclusive right to mourn the one only child of her marriage. Her mind flew back to the early days of married life, when they were comparatively poor, when the pomp and circumstance of luxurious living were out of their reach, when they were simple, bourgeois, comfortable people with one pretty little blue-eyed baby girl. How proud they had been, how fond, both of them, of her! James had been kinder, more good-natured, more affectionate then; the toddling curly haired mite, who walked with a finger of both upholding her, had linked them together. As she grew up her father—though still proud and fond in his way—had hardened and been often resentful of the mother's extravagant indulgence. Oh, for those first days again, when they were poor and happy! Now,

with these memories crowding on her aching heart, as she turned to meet her husband by that awful still bedside, his livid, broken, terrified look softened her heart to him. It was not *her* loss, then, *her* grief alone, that made it more possible to live through! She went to him, and flung herself like a girl on his breast—it seemed ages since she had done so.

"Oh, James! James!" she moaned out in that new piteous voice of hers which he did not recognize in the least, "my heart is broken! I want to die."

He burst out into loud sobs. "No, dear—no; don't say so! I can't be left all alone. I've only you now, dear—and I want you."

The common woe, the common bereavement drew these two together who had drifted apart. They were unheroic, worldly, unideal; but they were human, and nothing human is beyond the touch of the Divine.

Even Thomas Lees, coarse, brutal, as to a great extent he was, was smitten to the heart by what had happened, by a vain and horrible remorse. He crept to the house in the dusk, daring to come no nearer than the opposite side. What those blank white windows told him was enough—enough to shake his very soul. How could he have known a word would kill the child? Was he to blame? He had said nothing but the truth? Yes; but the truth may be a two-edged sword—and to stab a soft, fragile thing like that—through the heart! Good God! What would he not have given to have seen her come gaily down those steps, blushing, radiant, Geoffrey Trevenna's happy wife! As he stood and stared at the dreary, silent house he seemed to see Viola as he had seen her, not lately, but in the days when she was light of heart, a smiling, pretty picture of butterfly girlhood; a gently speaking, lively child, born to tread

on the roses, and to feed on the honey of life. And now, if the closely drawn blinds told the truth, she was lying stiff and cold—out of the reach of sunshine and joy—the roses would lie on her coffin, not under her feet—and it was his doing—so they would say—though he had meant nothing, but to punish her a little for having hurt him a great deal!

Mr. Lees went home stunned and overpowered with the weight of this horror. He was only passing through town; he went at once abroad. It was something to have put the sea between him and that awful frowning white-eyed house where Viola lay—what had been Viola. But the sea will never roll between us and our remorse, that is the worst of it. It is only Time that deadens self-hatred as all other hatreds, and for a while the hard man must dree his weird, and suffer for what he had never meant to do.

When Geoffrey came out of Viola's

room, where he had been alone—he had begged her mother to leave him alone there—for an hour or more, he looked ten years older than he had done, almost a middle-aged man. He had known, in a way, of her extreme fragility, it had seemed part of her, yet he had never for one moment connected the idea of Viola with *Death.* That would have seemed almost grotesque. This marble statue, with the stern smile carved on the soft lips, that had kissed him yesterday was no more his little Viola, than if they had spirited her away, and put an image of a monumental saint in her place. There had been nothing saintly, nothing cold, nothing seraphic about Viola, she had been full of the life of every day, something made for "praise, blame, kisses, smiles, and tears." Something to pet, to take care of, to caress and be caressed by—his own, his very own yesterday. To-day out of his reach, too awful to kiss, the touch of her

hand chilled the very blood at his heart. There was nothing even *like* his Viola, except those little mischievous soft curls that looked unnatural on the waxen white of the forehead. He could put his hand on those silky tendrils, he could kiss them; but her lips were no longer for his, he dared not touch that rigid smile, it seemed a profanation. Oh, how he had been planning to make her happy! How good he had meant to be to her! In years to come she should have been able to say, "My husband never hurt me, never said one unkind word."

Yes, he had planned, he had meant; then came the Fury with the abhorrèd shears, and slit the thin-spun life. How little it had taken, how little; but it was enough. She was dead—dead—dead! He kept on repeating the word to himself with dreary insistence. Just come to her majority, just on the threshold of her new life, and *dead.*

Geoffrey knelt on the floor by the white flower-strewn bed—for even now Viola was not to be left flowerless—and, laying his head beside her, sobbed out the vain protest of living man against the cruelty of death. The time was not come for consolation, he could only see the pity of it. Viola had not yet taken her place in any vision of beatitude, but was snatched in the sweet fragrance of her living maidenhood out of the reach of love and light. So few, few hours had done it, yet they felt like years already! So few that Penrose knew nothing, till in the evening Geoffrey himself came. He could not write, he could not put down the bare horrible announcement yet, he must tell Viola's friend himself. Penrose might have some word of comfort, it would be at least a relief to see her strong, sad look of full sympathy, and to hold her kind hand. There is a secret about some people that makes

those who suffer turn first to them. She came in to see him, looking as usual, a little serious—for it was not cheerful work watching by her mother—but with an effort to meet him cheerfully; but her first glance at him killed her attempt at a smile.

"Oh, Geoffrey," she said, gazing at him with dilating eyes; "something has happened! You look so ill."

He tried to speak, but not a word would come. The struggle to force his dry lips into articulate syllables was frightfully hard, but vain. He could only just say "Viola"—and Penrose seemed to know. She came close to him as he staggered suddenly—the day had been too hard, too terrible—and, putting her arm strongly and softly round him, forced him into a seat.

"Viola is ill? No! don't speak, Geoffrey—I see, I know. Viola is dead."

He made an assenting movement with his head, his burning piteous eyes fastened

on hers, he grasped at her hand. She knelt down by him and softly laid her cheek on his hand which she pressed in hers.

"My poor Geoffrey—my poor Geoffrey!"

She felt as a mother feels towards a child who is in deep sorrow—more than a sister. Everything must wait till some consolation could reach him; she asked no questions, she did not say another word, she only softly rubbed her cheek on his hand and then let her lips rest on it. All the maternal in her large heart was awakened by the pitiful helplesness of his grief. He had been strong enough to comfort and soothe Viola's father and mother, who were so utterly broken down and desolate that he dared not give way, but now the rush of his own feelings must be allowed to flow. He came to Penrose, not in vain, for strength and help. She waited on him, petted him as if he had been a boy again, her own girlhood was

forgotten, she seemed years older than he, now that the tension was over and he could let himself break down. He sobbed first, dry, painful, spasmodic sobs ; then it seemed as if some hard barrier gave way, and he could cry like a woman. He had not cried since he was a little fellow at school, it was dreadful to Penrose to see and hear him, but she was glad for his sake, and glad that he was not ashamed to cry before her. She knew how much that meant in a proud man of the world. There would never be anything strange now between them, she was one of "the peculiar people that death had made dear" to him, dearer than before, his friend, his sister, his kith and kin. It seemed to her that her heart had all the while foreseen this very hour in some vague, mysterious way ; as if this explained her invariable feeling for Viola—that she was to be spared pain, to be differently, more tenderly treated than the rest, that it was

far easier to suffer one's self than to let her suffer. At the inmost depth of her heart she had somehow guessed or foreboded this doom that had fallen on her and broken her to pieces.

"Oh, if only it had been I instead!" she said sadly to herself; "there's no one to break their heart about me, and I should not have been afraid or sorry. But it is Viola who is taken, and I am left to work, for it must be for that I have to live. It was a pity, surely, for Viola was happy." Geoffrey stayed till late with her. He was too utterly exhausted by his grief and the full expression of it, though that was a deep relief, that he was glad to rest silent and still, seeing no one but Penrose, to whom he need not say a word, for Penrose understood. He rested like a child on her affection.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICH people and poor have different ways of bearing the inevitable bereavements which are no respecters of persons. It is supposed that the former find some compensation in the power of spending money in alleviations, but unfortunately alleviations are not always in the market, and they buy a spurious substitute in the form of "change of scene," travel, and superb monuments. I do not know whether Mrs. Field would have been more unhappy had she been the hard-worked, impecunious wife of a struggling man, and had been obliged to give scant time to the indulgence of tears and solitary grief, but to put all out-

ward indulgence in it on one side, because neither house, husband, nor daily work could spare her. But, as it was, everybody prescribed immediate change as the only panacea for the rich people who could afford to travel all over the world *en prince*, if it solaced them to do so. She must not cry her heart out in Viola's room, hardly daring to handle the little familiar prettinesses which all bore the image and superscription of her dead darling, the tiny slippers that were the very mould of her light foot, the gloves that had the shape of her hand, the scent that she liked to use, the fan her father gave her, worst of all, the dainty costumes, the dressing gown, the white, lacy-fine garments that all ministered to her charm. Her husband and her sister were urgent on the necessity of not "letting her fret" too much, only they could not light on any new expedient to prevent it; so she must be taken away. She resisted at first

angrily yet weakly. She was broken-hearted—nothing could alter that. She should never be happy again, and there was no use in dragging her about the world. She liked best to stay where Viola had been last, and break her heart her own way! Her husband, however, was very kind, affectionate, and subdued, and he went the right way to persuade her out of this angry phase of grief, which resented her misery, and refused to allow any efforts at softening it. He implored her to think of him, if not of herself. He was unhappy enough, Heaven knew, and he couldn't bear her to kill herself with grief, and leave him all alone.

"Well," she said, half softened, half petulant, breaking into fresh tears, "I'd best do that. I'll never be any good or comfort to any one again, and you'd be well rid of me, James!"

His answer was a reproachful protest, which convinced her that, after all the

growing hardness and callousness of their middle-aged intercourse, he *did* care still for her.

"I didn't think you thought much of me now, James," she said, sobbing, but less violently. "Somehow we've got out of the way of being fond of each other. I dare say I was to blame. I thought so much of—of her, I hadn't much heart to spare; and you were always so busy, and so full of your notions. But you've been kind to me since—since——" Sobs supplied the rest.

Her husband kissed her a little rapidly, as if rather ashamed of the demonstration.

"One can't be always making a fuss of one's wife, you know, my girl; but I didn't mean you to think I didn't care."

In this new softening towards each other, which was the only mitigation the mother's pierced heart could find, she yielded to his wish to travel, and did not again express what she felt of the utter

futility of this cure for the emptiness and ache of her loss. Every little thing was a stab. She had to piece her changed life together painfully, as best she could, when all was changed; the very centre round which all her plans and hopes revolved, even. The old name "Papa," which she had called her husband, had to be dropped hastily, as one of the usages which hurt her sore spirit; she must go back to the long disused name. He, too, must forget to call her "Mother;"—she was no one's mother now! She could not bear to leave the things and places that were full of Viola, though every one had its separate anguish, but she let the preparations go on. Besides her sister, Dr. Maynard, and the people she was obliged to see, there were only two she asked for—Geoffrey, who came and went constantly, and to whom she clung as if he had something of a son about him; and Penrose, whom she asso-

ciated now with her generous care for Viola. Penrose came as often as she could; if it had not been that her mother still lingered on, Mrs. Field would have urged her accompanying them abroad. Viola had been fond of her, had gone to her in that trouble which had begun all this terrible time. This was enough. Mrs. Field did not care to understand much more. What Penrose was in herself, or in relation to others, did not affect her greatly; it was simply as Viola's friend that Viola's mother cared for her. Penrose was sad enough herself, but she did not grudge the interviews, which meant nothing but listening to endless lamentations and the repetition of Viola's qualities, mingled with tears and sobs. Mrs. Field's grief was entirely unlike, in its mode of expression, any which Penrose could understand; its expansiveness, and, at times, almost grotesqueness, astonished her; but she could at least listen and be sorry, if

she was surprised by its methods, for it was none the less real for being outspoken. Mrs. Field inherited the traditions of those who wore glass windows in their hearts. She came of the people who feel strongly, and express freely what they feel. Perhaps it is the best for them that they can. Penrose asked for no return. She did not expect Mrs. Field to trouble much about her long, weary nursing; the sadness of that waiting for physical to follow mental death. The whole world was full of her own woe, and only that which touched upon it was interesting. She would speak of Mrs. Trevenna's death, when it came, as a "happy release." So it would be; but Penrose was not one to call it or to think of it as such.

"Geoffrey will still have Redwood, I suppose?" Mrs. Field said suddenly, after one of these visits, the last Penrose was to pay her before they left London.

The question startled the hearer. She

had hardly thought of Redwood, or plans for the future, lately. What did that matter, when everything she had planned was altered? She shrank a little from answering. The question jarred. Yet Penrose was not wont to shrink from anything direct and straightforward.

"Oh, I don't know; I've not thought. Oh yes, I suppose so—some day, if he cares. That can wait."

"It's nothing to me now," Mrs. Field said, half resentfully. "Of course I don't trouble. My poor darling might have been happy there, thanks to your goodness; but that's all over, like everything!"

Penrose did not reopen the subject. Neither she nor Geoffrey ever mentioned Redwood. There was a dead silence between them as to the future, and they did not meet much. London had grown intolerable.

While Mrs. Trevenna was a little better for a short time, Jane and Penrose were

able to move her some way out of town, but in reach of her doctor. Geoffrey had waited till the Fields were gone, and then he, too, wandered off to look for peace of mind. He was too restless to care to stay anywhere long, but he wanted to get hundreds of miles away, and to go from place to place. His chambers were haunted as well as the great mansion which the Fields called home, by the slight, flitting figure, the soft, pathetic voice, and the dark blue eyes that were only memories. There was no one left in England to change the flowers that had begun by being heaped in costly profusion on Viola's grave. They withered just as fast as if they had not cost enough to keep a poor family for a month.

It was late in October when the end came to the nothingness which was all of so-called life left to Mary Trevenna. It was, as often is in these lingering cases, rather sudden at last. Just one uncon-

scious struggle of the flesh, then stillness and a silence just one degree more than that which they had come to consider living. Here was no wild wail of lamentation; here was no despairing regret, no raging against Destiny. She had done months ago with all the conscious pleasures and solaces of life; she was faithfully loved by just her own two, but even they could not wish to stretch her any longer on the rack of the world. Her going made a blank, a void, a pause; but the grief and the regret had been lived through some time before, when first she failed.

Mr. Hamley, whom Mrs. Trevenna had made her general adviser and man-of-business when she was left in possession of Redwood, was very kind and useful now, in his dry, matter-of-fact way. He came at once, and Penrose found that very dryness of his a relief. She did not want pretended sympathy and condolence; nobody could exactly imagine what her mother's death

was to her, and she was afraid of a false note as she was of any expression of herself just then. It was much easier to keep up the calm, friendly attitude of mere business relations, and to accept the help he offered as lawyer and clear-headed man of the world.

There was no will; none was needed. Mr. Trevenna's had been explicit enough.

"You are sole heiress. Redwood of course belongs to you," Mr. Hamley concluded by saying.

Penrose looked him straight in the eyes. It was difficult to say what she had to say; therefore, after her wont, she faced it at once, as she would have done an enemy.

"By law I know it does," she said calmly and with determination; "but not by justice, and not by *my* will. I mean to give it to my cousin, Geoffrey Trevenna. I want you to see that this is done legally —as my gift, I suppose it must be; but I feel it is his right."

"My dear Miss Penrose, are you serious in what you say? Have you thought?"

"I fancied I seemed serious," Penrose returned, with the faintest of smiles. "It isn't a time for joking. I told Geoffrey three months ago what I meant. I have not changed."

"But why—why? People don't throw estates about as if they were cowslip balls!"

"I had my reasons. Some things are altered, but not all. I still have reasons. One I told you of. I consider it just. My—Mr. Trevenna did not treat Geoffrey well. Another is a selfish one, purely. I *hate* Redwood. I was miserable there. I would not live there. I could not bear it."

"Well, you could let it well. You are not obliged to live there now. Some day—if you married, for instance—you might be glad of such a home."

"I do not mean to marry."

Mr. Hamley suppressed a smile. "Ah; and you are—what are you? Under twenty-three, I think. Well, what *do* you mean to do, Miss Penrose?"

"I mean to go to London, to have a studio, to be an artist."

"Indeed? Well, that is definite. I am glad you have a plan of life. Let that be, and return to Redwood. All this is no reason, as I said, why you should give it to Geoffrey Trevenna. I will grant you that his uncle's will was hard on him. He ought to have been prepared for the change in his prospects. It was a difficult, even a cruel, situation for a young fellow, used to luxury and fashionable life, to be placed in at a moment's notice, and he came out of it very well, far better than I expected him to do after his early youth, which was not—well, not exemplary. He is now working himself up to a fair position, he has influential

friends, and some day may succeed at the Bar. On the whole, he has not suffered much from the change in his outlook; it has, in fact, been good for him. I beg you to reconsider this idea of yours."

"No, I am quite determined," Penrose said obstinately; "I want you to settle it for me legally. Geoffrey must grant me an income of three hundred pounds a year—I don't want more; I will not take more—and settle a pension on my mother's sister of perhaps a hundred pounds for life, and Redwood is to belong to him absolutely."

"Should not I ask him to come here? He is your only kinsman. He should be present at your mother's funeral. Then you can settle it with him. He is on circuit. I advised him to go; but he could be sent for."

"No. I do not want any one here now. I cannot tell you why, but I want to be alone."

"And what are your wishes about it all?"

"I wish my mother to be buried in the little churchyard at Copsley. She and I lived there twenty years nearly. She was fond of the place. She often went and sat under the trees in the churchyard. If you will make the arrangements for me, Mr. Hamley; if you will be good enough to see Mr. Folliott, the vicar, I shall be very grateful."

"My dear," the lawyer said, with a touch of feeling, "you may command my services in any way. You are too much alone. You are very brave and strong, but it is not good for you. Let me send for some friend."

At the moment Penrose was a little too much choked to answer; but she shook her head.

"Mrs. Morrison? She is a good, kind woman."

"Yes, but she talks too much," Penrose said with an effort.

"Mr. Grey? He is deeply attached to you."

"I shall be glad to see him, if he can come."

Mr. Hamley acted on this concession at once. He was sorry for Penrose; he respected her independence, her straightforwardness, her courage—all of her he could understand, but that was not much, for Penrose was another self with the few she really loved. Mr. Grey was one of those. His sweet, patient temper, his purity and quietly profound religiousness, broad and still as a calm sea, gave her not only affection, but reverence, which she loved to feel. She was glad that he was able to come, and that he could understand her persistence in renouncing Redwood, which puzzled and rather annoyed Mr. Hamley. But he had to take his instructions, as he said, since she was

obstinately fixed on the action, and he wrote the driest and most legal letter he could frame to Geoffrey, apprizing him of Miss Trevenna's deliberate intentions in the matter.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was not likely that Mrs. Folliott would be selfish enough to withhold from her old friend Miss Babb such a tit-bit of news as that Mrs. Trevenna —known in Copsley for so long as Mrs. Hall—was to be buried on Thursday, October 25th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in the pretty little tranquil churchyard, which lay only a few hundred yards from Heathside Cottage. Miss Babb, on her side, had faithfully and generously reported a full and particular account of her meeting in May with Penrose, and of her handsome gift of a

"magnificent black silk, worth seven and sixpence a yard, if a penny."

The same splendid garment had rustled to church every Sunday since, in conscious dignity, and there was hardly a soul in Copsley who did not know from whom it came.

Miss Babb was on the *qui vive* in a moment, when Mrs. Folliott dropped in on Monday, to give her the news, though she had been dozing the minute before over the *Copsley Echo.*

"Good gracious! So that poor thing is dead! Well, to be sure, she didn't live long to enjoy her dignities."

"Enjoy! My dear Miss Babb, I don't think she had much to *enjoy.* It must have been a miserable position. No one would visit her, as I told you."

"No. But I think they might have stretched a point and forgotten a scandal more than twenty years old. I always say no one could have led a quieter life

than she did here, quite that of a nun, and it did seem hard to treat her as if she'd been flaunting in sin. When people are well off, others forget, as a rule, what happened in their youth; but she didn't know how to carry it off, poor soul. She was a meek, down-trodden, poor-spirited creature. I never could understand how she had a fine daughter like Penrose. Well, of course, Mr. Folliott buries the poor thing—is Meggotts undertaker?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then one can hear all the arrangements. I'll call on Mrs. Meggotts, she was asking me the other day about my receipt for elder wine. Do you know who follows?"

Miss Babb, though of an age when some might suppose funerals would be a painful subject, revelled in them, as a ghoul was supposed to do in churchyard details. She seemed to conceive herself immortal, though she had cheerfully given minute

directions to her nearest friends, with regard to her own mortuary arrangements. Mrs. Folliott, though she took a grave professional interest in funerals, as in other Church functions personally superintended by herself, had not the same relish for the subject, and considered her old friend a little too open in her discussions. She answered with reserve that she believed it would be a very quiet ceremony, naturally, but that Penrose was coming.

"I shall go, of course," Miss Babb cried, with a solemn kind of glee. "I have a great regard for Penrose. I should not think of keeping away; she will be gratified at respect shown that poor creature"—this was Miss Babb's constant name for Penrose's mother—"and I shall speak to her afterwards. She shall come in here, and have a cup of tea."

"My dear Miss Babb! It would not be at all fitting after her own mother's funeral!"

"Pooh! Penrose isn't one to show conventional foolish sentiment. From what I heard of her state in London, it must be a blessed release, and if so, Penrose won't pretend to be broken-hearted."

"No — pretend — certainly not; but there's a decorum at such times."

"Oh, never mind decorum," the outspoken old lady declared. "It won't hurt Penrose to come in and see an old friend, and she can't starve if her mother is dead."

The day of Mrs. Trevenna's funeral was one of the still, mild, warm grey days of late October. The yellow and brown-red leaves hung motionless on their twigs. A plaintive-voiced robin sang its requiem to the fading year in the row of elms that bordered the sloping churchyard. Miss Babb was a little disappointed. There was no show at all, just one great cross of white chrysanthemums on the plain coffin,

no streamers, no floating black draperies, no crowd of friends. Penrose, plainly dressed "in mourning that would have done for a mere acquaintance," as Miss Babb said, with neither crape nor veil to hide her pale, steadfast, sad, but tearless face; Jane erect, grim, rigid with the effort to repress all show of feeling; Mr. Grey, Mr. Hamley. There was no one else, for Penrose had told Geoffrey plainly she had rather he did not come. There were some kindly old Copsley faces, and Penrose did not miss any one of these; she was glad to see that they were remembered and cared for, in the place where they led those quiet secluded years. There were poor people to whom Mrs. Trevenna had furtively given things, and with whom Penrose had had friendly relations, there were a few of the better class, who had been neighbourly. Miss Babb was in the fore-front, in a sombre garb, which she called "her funeral dress," which had seen

much service, and she also wore her funeral expression, which she put on with the rusty crape bonnet. She looked piercingly at Penrose—delicacy was not, as you may suppose, Miss Babb's strong point—and was gratified to find she had been right in her prognostications; for Penrose did not weep, she did not lose her self-control even when she took her last long look on what held what had been her mother. But her strong, upright figure trembled, she was very white, it was no want of feeling, as Mrs. Folliott feared, that kept back all weeping and wailing.

The robin's sweet, sad, fitful notes were an echo of the calm sorrowfulness which yet was full of hope. It had been a mournful and a long decay, but there was peace, her daughter believed—she seemed to *know* there was peace behind the veil for Mary Trevenna's weak, weary, gentle soul. The robin seemed to Penrose to

have a more direct message of consolation, as it sang on through the stillness and the hush of the grey day, than the words which the sonorous voice of Mr. Folliott repeated half mechanically, as he had repeated them a hundred times at unconsidered graves.

She and Jane stood quite alone together for a minute, as the rest fell back and moved away. Penrose held out her hand, Jane clasped it convulsively. Her head had fallen at last, and hard spasmodic sobs suddenly shook her. Penrose roused herself from her dream and came close to her, with one arm round the tall, but bent, thin frame. She drew her near to her and kissed her.

"Dear," she whispered, "it is worst for you—for you bore so much before I knew; but it is well with her now, and it will be well with you."

Jane Chegwidden could not answer, though the love that spoke in the embrace

was her one comfort and happiness. Her stern Calvinism rose up to contradict the hope that whispered to her. *She* could not be sure that it was "well" with her poor Molly, she could only shudder and pray.

Miss Babb's voice made them both start. Its loud tones were a little subdued, but they were jarring enough at such a supreme moment. It was all Penrose could do to forgive them, and to remember that, after all, her old friend meant, after her fashion, to be kind.

"My dear, just come quietly in to the cottage with me and have something—and Jane too," she added, with a kind of condescending superiority, "if she likes. It's a very sad, distressing time for you, I know—your poor mother must have been a terrible sufferer—but you won't mind an old friend like me!"

"Thank you, Miss Babb," Penrose said, a little coldly, keeping her arm in Jane's;

"but I cannot now—we are going back to the station."

She turned away, leaving Miss Babb grievously disappointed and a little ashamed. She had hoped to have gleaned some particulars as to Penrose's future, and had not expected "after her sensible behaviour, and considering what a release it was" that she would not feel inclined for the society of even "such an old friend."

Penrose repented her coldness before she had gone many steps. It never did to expect refinement of feeling from Miss Babb; but she *had* been kind, she wanted, at least, to be kind. She came back and took her hand, looking in her face with grave gentleness.

"I can't now—I really can't, dear Miss Babb! I can't talk to any one—but I will come and see you. I shall be in London, and I shall often come to Copsley *now*. I want to ask you to be kind

enough to see that they keep—*that*," she pointed to the grave, "in good order between the times I come. Will you?"

"That I will! Bless you, my dear," Miss Babb cried, kissing her with sudden effusion. "You were a good girl always, and I'm sorry if I hurt you."

She was surprised to find tears dimming her spectacles, though it *was*, certainly, "such a happy release."

Those words strike cold on the hearts of those who have lost some helpless, useless dependant on love, who has been dearer than the world could guess.

Penrose did not feel "released," as she knew that there was no more to be the feeble, urgent stress of her mother's broken life upon hers; that she was free to go and come as she chose, with no sense that she was absent from duty. It needed all her valour to take up and make a new life for herself, to force herself into action, and to resolve that, however much alone

she might be, the little world round about her daily life should be none the poorer for her. That very evening she determined to put her plan into words to Jane, the very fact of doing so would help her to carry it out.

"You are not to be what you have been," she said, drawing Jane down to a seat, and keeping her hand on hers. "I am going to let every one know that you are my own aunt, my companion, and my friend."

"That you aren't," the other retorted, in her roughest strongest voice. "There's not a mite of the lady about me, nor never will be. I'm not going to belittle her or you by any such nonsense. *Jane* I've been to you all your life, and you shan't begin 'aunting' of me. No! It's no good your talking. You're obstinate enough, Pen; but I'm worse, and I won't have it."

"But, Jane," Penrose said, half smiling

as the old name slipped out, "it won't be proper for me to live as I mean to do unless I have a chaperon, and you've got to be that. Mrs. Morrison was horrified at the idea of it."

"Well, if that is so—though what a *chaperon* may be I haven't an idea—you can call me Mrs. Chegwidden; it sounds quieter and more decent-like than *Miss*, and what you want of me I'll do. But *Jane* I'll be to you to the end of the chapter. But where are you going to live, after all, Pen—in London, as you talked of?" Jane suppressed a sigh. She would follow Penrose, of course, into a Pandemonium, if need be; but she hated London with the true spirit of one born in the sound of the wild Cornish sea.

"I want to be in London all the winter, and study hard. Then in the summer we will take a little cottage in Cornwall, and I will paint."

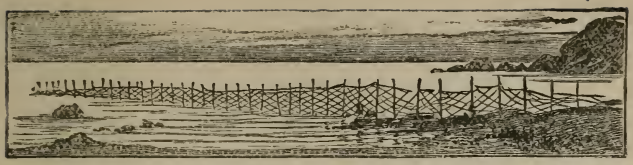
Jane's hard face brightened. "Well,

that'll be good. But choose your own way, my dear. I'll not thwart you. It'll not be a bad way. You're young, though, Pen, over young to settle to such a life as that."

"I feel old," Penrose said, and a deep sigh rose and fell in her breast.

She was not one to linger over any project. At times a great restlessness and impatience seized her. She moved in a day to the four rooms she had taken near her friend, Mr. Lyons' studio, and there she established herself and Jane. The prospect of hard work at art was one which was interesting enough to her, to deaden regret for the past, and some blankness in the future.

Mr. Lyons welcomed her with pleasure as a pupil. She had never lost the favour she found in his eyes the evening of Mrs. Spencer's dinner-party.



CHAPTER XVI.

GEOFFREY entered Penrose's studio the afternoon she was fairly settled there. He had received Mr. Hamley's strictly business communication on circuit, as to Miss Trevenna's intentions with regard to Redwood, and lost no time in following it up with a personal interview with his cousin.

As the two met and looked in each other's faces almost as earnestly as if they had been strangers, each was struck with a sense of change in the other. It seemed to Penrose that this man was not at all the Geoffrey Trevenna she met first at the time of her father's death; the dark,

handsome, rather careless, rather cynical, good-tempered face had grown to bear another character. He had suddenly become a man of purpose in life, of determination. The keen, half-mocking glance had deepened and strengthened; there were lines in the forehead and about the mouth there used not to be. He looked like, as he was, one who meant to *be* something, to *do* something. What she did not guess was the motive that underlay the change. He looked a less fascinating man of society, no longer one to attract the light, passing *furore* of a ball-room, but one that a woman might care to search and know beneath the surface. He said a few words of sympathy for her loss, the first that had not jarred on her, for he seemed to understand the blank that her mother had left unfilled, and then he went boldly straight to the point.

"About this Redwood business, Penrose.

You'll forgive me if I plunge into it at once? I can't accept the thing *now*. Every circumstance is changed, and I can't consent to burden myself with an enormous obligation which has ceased to be in any way necessary or reasonable. Hamley wrote to me. I could not answer by letter. I felt I must have it out with you face to face."

Penrose had coloured deeply. It was the flush not of shame but of pain. She was seated by her easel, and busied herself with arranging the materials which were wanted for the canvas upon it.

"You don't know how you hurt me when you call it an 'enormous obligation,'" she began in a low voice.

"But why, Penrose? It is the truth. I thought *you* never shirked the truth."

"It is *not* the truth—not in my mind. I told you before, I tell you again, that I feel it to be an act of right, of justice, of restitution."

"My dear cousin, I do not want it. I could not live there, and I mean to make a different career for myself now than that of a small landed proprietor. When I accepted it, as I said, circumstances were different. I took it then from you as a gift, as a gift to—to Viola"—his voice sank. "We need not go into all the differences, need we?"

There was a pause for some moments, a deep silence only broken by the slight movement of Penrose's hand amongst her paints. Then he spoke again, quietly enough, but with an effort—

"Tell me, Penrose, if you were forced to settle what to do with Redwood, quite independently of any fancied obligation to me—as if I didn't exist—what you would choose. I know you would not live there. I know what your plans are, and I believe they are best for you." He waited another minute for a reply, which came slowly at last.

"If I—if I could not make you take it—if I were forced to consider it as mine, I think I should wish to make it a place where some one might be happy; it has seemed to me so gloomy, as if no one ever were happy there."

"Yes. Well, how would you do that?"

"I would put a really nice motherly woman in, with a country girl or two to help her. I would shut up that cold fine drawing-room, and lock up such of the books as I didn't give away—Mr. Grey, you know, is to have all of them he wants. Then I would send down children who had been ill, or delicate women and girls, to get strong—but it is only an idea. I dare say it could not be carried out."

"Why not? Where is the difficulty?"

"Could I afford it?" she asked timidly; "could I keep it up and have enough to live on myself?"

"Yes, I think so, if you did not attempt

too much. So that would be what you would like?"

"Yes; but," she added eagerly, "I would like best for *you* to take it as your right, Geoffrey, as I feel it to be."

"I will not," he said strongly, almost fiercely. "I say I *will not.* Make your plans, Penrose, for doing this, if it will please you to do it. I have made up my mind, and I won't give way to you. Mr. Hamley will tell us that we are a couple of fools; that, if I refuse Redwood—as I do, definitely and distinctly—you should let it advantageously, and reap the benefit of the income. But I know you better than Mr. Hamley; I know your conscience will not be easy unless you are doing the utmost possible good to somebody else. It is very foolish, very *outré*, very Quixotic; but it is your way. And if a rich woman chooses to be Quixotic, I don't see why we should interfere with her any more than if she has a craze for diamonds. So let us

agree to give each other liberty—you shall become a celebrated artist, and spend your income on any philanthropic schemes that satisfy your greed for good works. I shall struggle on and do my level best to make a respectable career. But I'll have none of your Redwood, my cousin."

Something strange in his new tone and manner towards her perplexed and troubled Penrose. She was vaguely wondering whether he were angry, vexed, out of sympathy with her. Yet she was influenced, ruled by his altered self, as she had never been before.

She had been strong in her determination to give up Redwood to him before he came. She had never imagined it possible that she should yield this idea; but she had yielded, without a struggle, as if she had been the most docile of women. Something tied her tongue and froze her manner, something also seemed to be at work with him, that made him brief, and a

little cold. Each felt the chill acutely, but both were powerless to prevent it. Penrose however, was utterly in ignorance, of the real cause of this estrangement. Geoffrey knew well enough what motive kept him aloof from any sentiment, even from expression of simple, natural friendship. He was *afraid of himself*. He had made up his mind what was the honourable and right attitude for him to hold, and he dared not relax an inch of his restraint. The change in their relations was much less painful to him than to Penrose, for underlying the coldness and reserve which was the barrier he unconsciously put between himself and temptation, he was aware of a certain thrill of exultation. He had mastered the proud, stubborn will that had seemed such a tameless thing. This new Penrose, uncertain, shy, girlishly awkward with him, had a charm of her own, distinct from any he had found out in her former self. The knightly warrior maid

had grown suddenly a mere girl—a lonely girl, a little sad, a little angry, yet with both passion and tenderness at easy reach. He loved his Britomart in this aspect, as he never had before. But they parted coolly enough, and Geoffrey had not broken his contract with himself. He had set himself a task which had got to be done—the time was not come for the heart to speak.

Mr. Hamley fulfilled Geoffrey's prediction exactly. He did think the pair two fools, though he worded his strictures a great deal more discreetly and politely. That a nice snug little property like Redwood should go a-begging, and that the owner of it should entertain such ridiculous Utopian fads regarding its occupation, struck him as an absurdity almost bordering on the insane. He obtained only one concession, which was that Penrose would let the place furnished for six months, and consent to begin her

"philanthropic nonsense" in the summer. He had more respect for Geoffrey's ambitions than for Penrose's charity. He owned it would be a pity for Trevenna not to stick to his profession, in which, partly through interest, partly by ability, he was certainly rising. The hard-headed solicitor could understand a liking for work and distinction, if he could not in the least admire the foolish ideas which ruled people who were unfortunate enough to start charitable delusions that never paid and never worked. He was less sympathetic with a phase in Geoffrey's development which was a delight to his cousin, namely, the appearance of one or two clever, if light, articles in one of the better-class magazines of the day.

It was a full winter, as far as work went, for both Geoffrey and Penrose; but they saw little of each other, and the slight but perceptible change in their relations did

not alter. Penrose supposed that it was his loss of Viola, of all his hopes for the future, that had changed him. Geoffrey knew well enough what were his reasons and his intentions for the future; but Geoffrey was a man of the world, and knew how to keep his own counsels.

Penrose had other friends, who *ought* to have filled up all deficiencies; not many, but real friends in different ranks of life. Mrs. Spencer had tried to take her up again; but somehow this did not come to much—the elements of intimacy were lacking. Yet Penrose was glad now and then to spend a few hours at her house, where it was always pleasant, at any rate. Mrs. Morrison, though disapproving of the unconventionality of her way of living, was always heartily kind to her. Mr. Lyons was a staunch and intimate friend, and through him she came to know a few artists. Now and then she went to visit Mrs. Field. Poor Mrs. Field was sadly

altered. She had grown to look almost old, and had fallen into invalidish, fanciful ways from sheer lack of interest and happiness in life. Time had softened the violence of the expression of her grief; she only cried now and then, and especially when Penrose was alone with her, and ready to listen to endless reminiscences of Viola's childhood and later days; but it was a loss that not even a lifetime might make easy to bear. Her husband and she were more to each other from their common bereavement; but Mr. Field was not, and never could be, a really sympathetic companion. When a man's heart contracts into a money-box it is unnatural to expect it to hold much else. The great, grand house was dreary in its empty luxury. Penrose felt it a sad one, but she never avoided the visits Mrs. Field demanded of her. The pretty painted image of the dead girl ruled over the rooms still where her light voice and step

had gone for ever. Viola was not forgotten, and in her mother's heart she reigned, and would reign, supreme over the wastes and oblivions of Time.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was early in August in the following year when Penrose stuck up her easel amongst the rocks of the coast near the cottage where Jane and she had spent the summer. It was a glorious day, and her eyes feasted themselves with a perpetually recurrent delight on the grand sweep of rock scenery, sea-pool, and virgin sand which was spread out before her. It was lonely as an untrodden world. Not a footstep except her own had spoilt the smooth perfection of the glittering sand; only the gulls and cormorants disputed her undivided right to the solitudes of the

shore. It was a little misty far away—the distant headlands had drawn a slight veil over their dark and rugged features; in the foreground the mussel-embroidered brown rocks, rich with seaweed, stood out bold against the softness of the grey-blue haze. It was a spring tide, and had not yet turned. She had two or three hours of undisturbed silence and repose to work in, if no stupid picnic-party from St. Par's or some other larger place invaded her.

Ah, how tiresome! Here came the probable precursor of the set—a solitary man in dark-blue serge and knickerbockers. She just glanced at the speck which disturbed her as a forerunner of more, and did not watch him as he scrambled down the rocky pathway by which she had come.

Penrose was far too much absorbed in the enthralling interest of her sketch to trouble about a stray tourist. Men were not half so interesting at that moment as

a difficult and elaborate bit of foreground in the shape of a rock, which seemed a perfect study of every conceivable shade of brown, gold, green, and grey, and which had mirrored itself to admiration in the clear deep pool which last tide had bequeathed it. She could not sing a bit, but she was crooning some vague tune to herself because life was just then absorbingly sweet, and there was some inarticulate music at her heart; but her humming changed into a startled cry as some one came towards her across the sand from the foot of the cliff, and hailed her by her name.

"Geoffrey!"

"Yes, it is Geoffrey. But why should that scare you so? I wrote——"

"I never got a letter. The post is late and very irregular where we are."

"I just left my bag at your cottage and came on. Mrs. Chegwidden was out; but they told me where to find you. The

woman says I can have a room—that is, if you don't mind—if you won't be sorry to have me."

Sorry! She did not say a word, but her grey eyes gave him an answer. She did not seem to get over her start very easily, and her colour was high.

Geoffrey looked at her all over from head to foot with an eagerness of scrutiny which made her turn her face away. She was carelessly, even roughly dressed, in a short plain serge skirt with a blue linen blouse and a yellow silk handkerchief knotted round her throat, her magnificent hair hung loose in two great plaits ; it was not dry yet after her last bathe. She was burnt brown as a gipsy. But Geoffrey's gaze noticed no faults. She looked to him like a daughter of the sea, with its freshness and joy in her eyes.

"Ah," he said, drawing a long breath, "this is worth waiting for! I never seemed to know what paradise was like

before. Who wants a heaven better than this?"

He sat down on the rock behind her and looked about him; but his glance came back and settled on her. And after all, Penrose thought, men *might* be as interesting as even the rocks and the sea. She went on painting, but without seeing very well what her random touches were doing. She had thought she was perfectly happy before. She was not at all sure that she was happy now; but it did not occur to her to wish that he had not come, that he was staring at and confusing her, and she was spoiling her careful study from Nature.

"Penrose," he said lightly enough, "why do you bundle all that splendid hair of yours up in general as if it were a wisp of hay? I had no idea what it was like."

"It is wet," she murmured; "that is why I left it down."

"And you thought there was no one

to look at and admire it! I know that way of yours. You are the oddest, perversest, least vain, least self-conscious woman in all the world. I am sure it never occurred to you that there was anything beautiful about you."

"I think I have always been rather proud of my hair," Penrose said seriously, putting a red dab on a yellow-brown rock.

"Really!" he laughed aloud. "And your way of showing it has been to arrange it, apparently, with a pitchfork. I see. Well, has it also dawned upon you that there is anything else in you that is admirable, beautiful, out of the common? No, I don't believe it; and I am glad with all my soul that it is so, that you are just the Penrose you are. Now, look here. I have come hundreds of miles to see you. I am going to have my way with you in return. Leave off painting for a while. Don't be conscientious and industrious for an hour—

my hour. Put down your brushes. Let the sketch be—it's an awfully good one, by the way—and come here and sit by me. I want you all to myself. I must have you, too. I'm jealous of your picture, for it takes all your looks. I'd rather you let me have some of them."

"Well," she said resignedly, putting her brushes carefully down. "I am only spoiling it to-day. I had better be idle, I suppose."

She sat down on the rock obediently, and turned, as he wished, to look in his face. She did not move her eyes away, though her colour slowly rose and spread under his. He seemed to draw and magnetize her gaze.

He put out his hand, and she laid hers in it. They sat thus in silence, while the gulls chuckled at them.

"It seems ages since you and I were together," he said, with a long, deep breath. "I can hardly believe that it

isn't a dream. It seems too peaceful, too sweet, too ideal to be fact. I'm made anew here to-day, Penrose, I believe. I don't think I shall ever feel quite the same as before."

"Ah," she breathed, echoing his sigh, "it *is* beautiful."

A pause once more. Words come so slowly, with so much difficulty, when the deeps call to the deeps.

"Penrose, did it ever occur to you that I cared for you more than any woman in all the world?"

The question was asked so calmly and deliberately that it hardly startled her. She looked full in his face, and searched for the absolute truth with which to answer him.

"I was never sure, and the thought, when it came, never stayed; but I *have* fancied it, Geoffrey."

"And lately, what have you thought lately?"

"That we were hardly even friends—that something had changed you."

"But you know now that was not so? Shall I tell you as much as I can all the phases I have gone through? I should like you—you always seem the very spirit of truth to me—I should like you to know every single thing that I've felt since it first dawned upon me that there was no woman like my Cousin Penrose on earth. It is not easy to say when that began, precisely, perhaps I first thought it that evening we went to the theatre, and as we walked home we made a sort of compact of friendship. It was rather a painful feeling at first, it made me feel so small in my own eyes. We men like to be lords of the creation, and to have our women subordinate. *You* never fitted into the subordinate place at all, you were on too grand a scale altogether. I believe I was often angry with you for being so much over my head. Still it

went on and I began to wonder whether I could not force myself on to your level and that some day you might be able if not to look *up*, no longer to look *down* on me."

"Geoffrey, I never did!"

"No, my dear, you never did. If you had you would not have been an ideal woman any more. Then that time came —Penrose, I don't know how to speak of it, it's all exquisitely painful—I don't know how to say what I mean without seeming heartless or a conceited coxcomb! Viola came to me. I didn't love her as I used, there's no good blinking facts, I was not *in love* with her any more, my mind was full of so very different an idea. Yet I loved her, I can't bear any one to fancy I did not. I would not have given her any pain, any loss, any sorrow, no, not if it cost me everything! I felt myself bound to her—you understand, you don't think I was false to you by feeling so?"

"No, *no*," Penrose said, with fervent emphasis. "I felt then that you belonged to her. If I had begun to fancy anything else it all faded away, and I would not have altered anything. I wanted her to be happy—I never, truly *never*, grudged you to her."

He put her hand to his lips. "I knew you felt so. It was hardly giving up—for I hadn't begun to hope that you could belong to me. I meant, honestly, with all my heart I meant to be everything to Viola that I could be, to love and cherish her all my life. When she died it was the sharpest pain and sorrow—I would have given my life for her. I was not broken-hearted, but I believe I was ashamed of not being. I couldn't bear to begin any fresh hopes, and indeed I didn't seem able to make any. I was angry with you, really angry, when your mother died and you renewed that offer to me—it seemed *then* a degrading

offer—of Redwood. As if I cared for Redwood without you, and I did not see any signs in you that you could ever care for me. I vowed to myself that I'd work. I'd have some object—I'd make a very different life of it before I would ever risk an avowal to you. I have not done much, I am nothing; but I wasn't strong enough to keep it up, to stay away from you any longer. I *had* to come, I wanted you so terribly. Penrose, you must give me an answer. Coming from you it will be a true, noble, candid answer, and I'll accept it whatever it is. If you can't love me well enough to spend your life with me you'll say so, I know; if you can—dearest, if you can—before God it shall be a life none the worse for me, I swear that! I love you so much that I must love everything you do—all the beautiful ideas you have—all the devotion and self-sacrifice that you make a real thing—I *am* a better man for knowing you, dear, and I *shall*

be, whether you let me stay with you or whether you send me away; but you *won't* send me away?" he added, half pleading, half triumphant as he met the liquid, full sweetness of her eyes.

"No, Geoffrey, you must stay." She put her arms out to meet his, and let herself be clasped close to his breast. "I never left off loving you since I began, and that is long ago."

She let him kiss her pure lips that no man had touched. Why should she be false now who had never been false in her life? She was his wife, his own from that moment. She loved him, and was not ashamed.

* * * * *

Next spring there was a picture by Mr. Lyons in the Academy which a few people knew to be a portrait of Mrs. Geoffrey Trevenna, herself an exhibitor of a little Cornish picture.

It was painted by Mr. Lyons as a com-

mission from her husband, and the subject was taken from the "Faërie Queene." It represented Britomart taking off her helmet and letting her hair fall about her shoulders. It had Penrose's clear noble look, and the chivalrous bearing of the knight maiden.

Penrose thought it ridiculously idealized; but Penrose was never a good judge of herself. There are only one or two who love her deeply; but they think there is little need to idealize where the real has so much of the divine within it.

THE END.

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